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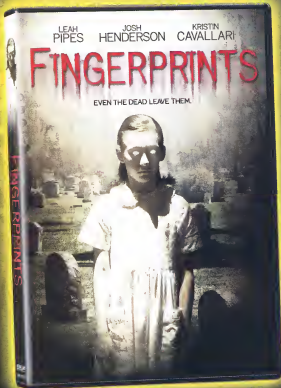
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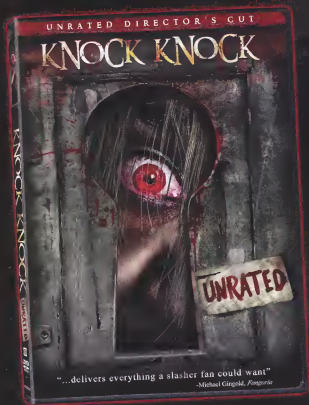
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THE LAST INTERVIEW WITH VAMPIRA 16

Just prior to her passing earlier this year, *Rue Morgue* was fortunate enough to have the final conversation with Milla "Vampira" Nurmi, the world's first horror host and glamour ghoul.

Plus: Her long-time friend Dana Gould paints an intimate portrait of Nurmi from her halcyon years to her golden years, a look at the new *Vampira* documentary, as well as her last feature film appearance in the Ed Wood-penned *I Wake Up Early the Day I Died*, by Dave Alexander, Dana Gould and Paul Curupe

THE REAL GHOST BUSTERS 26

The skeptics of *Ghost Hunters* try their damndest to explode the seemingly unexploitable — with sometimes surprising results. Plus: A round-up of the best and worst paranormal TV shows and more!

by Claire Hornell and Monica S. Kuebler

THE WITCH HUNTER'S BIBLE 32

A new translation of the notorious Malicious Maleficarum reveals further truths about the Medieval witch hunts, by Last Chance Lance

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS 36

Kris Kukul criticizes humanity through his intricate, morbid sculptures, by Monica S. Kuebler

THE BLEAK LANDSCAPES OF DIMMU BORGIR 40

A conversation with Norway's popular black metallers, by Keith Curman

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW 42

Rock community legend Del James joins *Rue Morgue* about the personal triumphs and tragedies that inspired his highly sought-after collection of horror stories, *The Language of Fear*, by Jovanka Vackovic

NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND 6

Vampira's funeral.

POST-MORTEM 7

Letters from fans, readers and weirdos.

DREADLINES 8

News highlights, horror happenings.

THE CORONER'S REPORT 12

Weird stats and morbid facts.

NEEDFUL THINGS 14

Strange trinkets from our bazaar of the bizarre.

CINEMACABRE 44

The latest films, the newest DVDs and reissues.

BOWEN'S BASEMENT 56

Spotlight: Spec and Speculation.

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS 58

The horror comic book gospel.

THE NINTH CIRCLE 61

Spotlight: *Varney the Vampire*.

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR 66

The Hollywood Forever Cemetery.

THE GORE-MET 68

Menu: China's Category III films.

AUDIO DROME 71

Spotlight: Johnny Hollow.

PLAY DEAD 74

New and upcoming games.

CLASSIC CUT 78

Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom*.





Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

JOVANKA, thank you for being one of the good guys. After reading your editorial in *RM*#76, I had a newfound respect for you (not that it wasn't already there). Seeing you stand up for the creative rights of writers and remind everyone that stealing from each other, especially in such a small community, is ethically wrong, was a thrill. It takes brass balls (you have them in spades) to write something like that. Thank you for having the integrity to fight the good fight and support horror writers (I myself am an aspiring screenwriter who is afraid to show my work to others for the reasons you outlined in your piece on theft).

I tip my hat to you, warrior woman!

Lisa Strange – Pensacola, Florida

I BELIEVE there is an error in James Burrell's article "Sweeney's Stage Fright." He writes: "As directed by renowned veteran stage director/producer Hal Prince, the play – based on a book written by author and playwright Hugh Wheeler, as well as a previous 1973 play by Christopher Bond..." Hugh Wheeler wrote the book of the musical, meaning the dialogue in the show, and Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics.

Mark Conrad – Burlington, Vermont

I AM WRITING in response to the "Top Ten Alternate Chair Jumpers" in John Bowen's column (*RM*#75). I was delighted to see *The Exorcist III* at the top of the list. That film is highly underrated and is the reason I have been such a huge fan of the horror genre. The mentioned scene is also one of the greatest scenes in horror history. Thank you for giving *The Exorcist III* the recognition it deserves.

Amanda Gragg – Mansfield, Ohio

I PURCHASED my first copy of *Rue Morgue* way back in July 2002 (*RM*#28) and I haven't missed a single issue since. However, starting with *RM*#73, I noticed

something was amiss. Where is Chris Alexander? The Schizoid Cinephile seems to be MIA. Mr. Alexander has been a part of your magazine even longer than I've been reading it. At first, I did not care for his writing, but over time his sense of humour and undying love for Fulci and Franco won my respect. I can only assume he has left to pursue other ventures and if so, I wish him all the best. This brings me to a major complaint. I mentioned that I read each issue of *Rue Morgue* from cover to cover. Well, that will soon change as I have read the first three installments of Bowen's Basement and can assure you I won't be reading another. It's boring, condescending, and about as funny as an impacted wisdom tooth. From now on, Mr. Bowen's column will just be a page I skip over on my way to Blood in Four Colours. How about giving Last Chance Lance his own column? Surely he's earned it by now.

Robert Amaeker
– Poplarville, Mississippi

I REALLY LOVE hearing about sleeper horror hits that have been out for awhile but have passed under my radar. An example of this is a movie called *Battle Royale*! I first heard about this wickedly gory gem in the October 2005 Halloween issue. You named *Battle Royale* as one of the top 100 Alternative Horror Films. Seeing this, I had to get my hands on a copy because if *Rue Morgue* said it was good... IT HAD TO BE GOOD! It took a while but I finally got it. What an awesome movie! I have since gone back to this issue to uncover more amazing movies that I was unaware existed, including *Calvaire*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Ich the Killer*, *May, Opera*, *Spider Baby*... I can go on and on! I'm sure there are way more great movies that I have yet to discover so keep churning out those "Greatest" lists.

Mike Ede – address withheld

I AM a long-time subscriber; I received my renewal notice and was going through the motions of writing out a cheque when I saw at the end of the current issue a giveaway for new subscribers. I wrote a brief note, which I enclosed in my renewal about how it would be nice to receive some kind of notice for being a long-time subscriber. I did subsequently receive a personalized note thanking me for my subscription – a very nice touch. A few days after that, I received notice in the mail that I had a parcel to be picked up at the post office. I headed over there and to my surprise and delight, it was from *Rue Morgue*! Inside were two DVDs and a small collection of stories from Edward Lee, Jack Kelechum, etc. that I'd won. I just wanted to say what a class act you guys are. Yours is the only mag I subscribe to as you are the authority on all things horror, you are Canadian and you have the courtesy to respond with such a kind personal gesture to my inquiry. I seriously doubt I would have gotten such a response from *Time*, or even *Hustler*, for that matter.

Pete v P – address withheld

DEAR GRUEL GURUS, can you please tell me why the best of the *Phantasm* movies, *Phantasm II*, is not available on DVD when all the other films are?

Tom Karpe – Oriskany, New York

Anchor Bay was unable to obtain the rights to this title from MGM and therefore was unable to release it last year. It is, however, available in the Anchor Bay UK Special Edition Region 2 3-disc Sphere Box Set (limited). – Ed

No unsolicited readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and content. Please send to edit@rue-morgue.com or

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Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Coscarelli pushes ahead with *Ho-Tep* prequel and novel adaptation

Devotees of Don Coscarelli's films are used to lengthy waiting periods between releases, largely since the LA-based filmmaker (best known for his *Phantasm* series and *Bubba Ho-Tep*) is a notorious stickler for autonomy. Nonetheless, there's a veritable flurry of activity in the Coscarelli camp these days: he's acquired the film rights to David Wong's cult hit novel *John Dies at the End*, a prequel to *Bubba Ho-Tep* is in the works and rumours of the long-awaited fifth *Phantasm* film continue to hover in the ether, even though details are scarce.

While he's reluctant to predict which of these projects will materialize first, *Bubba Ho-Tep* and the *She-Vampires* would appear to be the best along, with budget in place and several actors attached. "Stephen Romano and I wrote a terrific script," Coscarelli says. "Based on that screenplay I secured full funding for the production, at almost ten times what we had on the original."

Coscarelli also secured actor Paul Giamatti (*Sideways*, *Lady in the Water*) to co-star as Elvis' manager Colonel Tom Parker. In addition, a major box office star, who he won't name as of yet, is set to appear as the film's lead vampire. The biggest surprise for fans of the first *Bubba Ho-Tep*, however, will be that the filmmaker must recast the lead role, as Bruce Campbell won't be returning to play Elvis.

"Unfortunately, after lengthy discussions with Bruce Campbell we were unable to see eye-to-eye creatively," explains Coscarelli. "Obviously, I would have loved to work with Bruce; he's a great actor and would have been absolutely terrific in this expanded

role. *Bubba Ho-Tep* really allows the Elvis character to grow, exploring not only the elderly Elvis we know but also, via parallel flashbacks, a young and vital 1970s Elvis in all his karate-chopping glory, battling hideous demon-chicks with wicked big fangs and way skimpy tube tops. Casting another actor to assume the Elvis mantle is not something I take lightly."

Coscarelli's recent purchase of the rights to *John Dies at the End* (RMR75), is also something he's quite serious about seeing through. The horror-comedy tale sees a pair of college drop-outs trying in vain to stop an inter-dimensional invasion caused by a drug called "soy sauce." The director hadn't heard of the story when it was originally published online, but discovered it via an Amazon.com recommendation after it was released as a novel last August by Permuted Press.

"One day in my email I received a note from an Amazon bot saying, 'If you liked the book you just read, you'll really like *John Dies at the End*.' I guess the Amazon bots had the audacity to decide what my next movie project would be."

As for why he bought the rights, Coscarelli says it was no-brainer.

"I don't know - was it the dog who can drive, or the powerful street drug that can open inter-dimensional portals, or the cellphone calls from the dead? Actually, I think it might have been



Don Coscarelli: Busier than ever with three films on the go

the theme of loyalty in the story between the two friends who must face down the forces of darkness together when all instincts tell them to run like hell!"

Despite having scripted eight of his own films before trying his hand at literary adaptations, Coscarelli maintains that he enjoys working from existing material, providing that material is right. At the very least, he notes, the process is a far cry from the labour pains of the first *Phantasm* script 30 years ago.

"Starting the writing process with three solid acts and the lead character's voice already created is a wonderful luxury. ... It's not like working alone up in a cabin trying to figure out original reasons why your villain crosses time and space to shrink the dead."

John W. Bowen





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Lee Demarbre prepares tribute to the Godfather of Gore

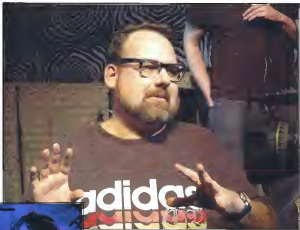
Dreadlines

Back in the 1960s, director Herschell Gordon Lewis pioneered the splatter-bappy horror aesthetic with a series of films that took cinematic bloodshed to an all new level. His sardonic, gore-drenched epics continue to earn the director new fans, including Ottawa-based filmmaker Lee Demarbre (*Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*), whose own genre-mixing cult hits invoke the deliriously crude aesthetic of Lewis' early efforts. Now, Demarbre is preparing a tribute to the Godfather of Gore with a back-to-basics celebration of the bloody and bawdy celluloid worlds that Lewis first created.

Dembare's film, slated for production this spring under the shooting title *In the Name of Gore*, was originally conceived as a remake of *Color Me Blood Red*, the last installment of Lewis' infamous Blood trilogy. In that mad killer flick, an artist finds that fresh plasma provides just the right vibrant crimson hues he needs for his paintings.

"When [screenwriter] Ian Driscoll and I started discussing the remake, we felt that a lot of familiar characteristics that make up Lewis' movies aren't in *Color Me Blood Red*," Dembare explains. "For example, *Blood Feast* is kind of a police procedural, and I thought it would be great to include that kind of an angle. All of a sudden, we were bringing in different elements from all his different movies, and it became less of a remake than a tribute to his entire oeuvre, even his non-gore movies."

According to Dembare, *In the Name of Gore* will feature a frustrated horror director, named after *Color Me Blood Red*'s mad painter Adam Sorg, whose amateurish gore effects are laughed at by audiences and critics alike. While out driving one day, the



Director Lee Dembare, and (left) Lucha libre star Ian Hodgkinson (a.k.a. *Vampiro*) in *The Dead Sleep Easy*



depressed Sorg accidentally runs over and kills a pedestrian, then decides

to use the victim's real blood and guts as props in his new film to hide the evidence. When the producers are blown away by the realism in his latest footage, Sorg must evade the police and go on a killing spree to finish his latest masterpiece.

For the all-important gore scenes, Dembare plans to take direct inspiration from Lewis' own innovations of using butcher shop scraps to represent human remains. It's a technique Dembare also used in his latest film, the action drama *The Dead Sleep Easy*.

"There's a scene where the hero, played by Lucha libre star Ian Hodgkinson (a.k.a. *Vampiro*), rips out the eyeballs of a villain, and drops them in a fish tank. They're real

eyeballs — pig eyes that I bought," he says. "In terms of the gore, that's what I want to do here. A lot of horror films are trying to do the next big thing in terms of gore, but they all look the same, because it's all CGI or it's all latex and foam rubber. I want to do something different, something... fleshier."

In addition to a planned cameo by Lewis himself as the voice of a radio announcer (a role he will reprise from *Blood Feast*), Dembare also notes that adult film star Sasha Grey will appear in *In the Name of Gore*.

"She has agreed to be in the film as a tribute to Playboy Playmate Connie Mason's role in *Blood Feast*. It's also kind of a nod to Marilyn Chambers' casting in *Rabid*. It's a Canadian tradition to hire a top porno star for your low-budget horror movie!"

Paul Corupe



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE
INFO HIGHWAY



petercallesen.com/index/index2.html

Peter Callesen crafts intensely atmospheric and morbid sculptures out of paper. His works include a skeletal hand rising from a blank page, a 3-D coffin surrounded by intricate flower cut-outs and a pathway of shattered glass that leads to a life-size disfigured deer. Intricate, captivating and strikingly original.

www.darkscribblesmagazine.com

Fans of horror fiction and thrillers will want to bookmark this online genre lit info destination (and be sure to include the "www"). The blog-style magazine includes author interviews, fiction reviews, book trailers, round-table discussions with industry professionals and contests. Dig the darkness!

Mak/learning/artimages/bodies/freak/gallery/freakgallery.html

Visit the British Library website to read up on Victorian-era freak shows and take in some authentic, vintage freak show posters from across the pond. Midgots, conjoined twins, Kase: The Missing Link, they are all here for your inspection.

bloodymessygirls.com

Less pornographic than *Suicide Girls*, but one hundred percent more gore-soaked, *Bloody Messy Girls* is for those who like a little horror and viscera with their pin-ups. More than just fleshful photo galleries, the website also offers streaming lo-fi film trailers, a forum, a shop and free registration. Devilish and dirty.

justsayit.com/tb/zombie

Ever wondered how well you'd do in the event of a zombie apocalypse? Take this fifteen question quiz and find out. For the record, I only stand a 42% chance of surviving, but then again we're not allowed to pack heat in Canada — which makes these head shots all the more difficult to pull off!



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Compiled by Monica S. MacBler
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New website enables users to develop horror film online

Trying to make art by committee is often considered the reason so many movies fail, yet that's exactly the approach Kenneth Woo and Brett Isahn are taking with Massify.com. The project intends to create the "first film developed entirely over the internet" — a horror title, no less.

"The horror community is the type of passionate audience that we felt fit with what we're trying to do with Massify," Woo tells *Rue Morgue* over the phone from New York.

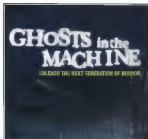
Unlike sites such as YouTube and iFilm, which allow burgeoning filmmakers to distribute their already completed movies, Massify attempts to build a mechanism for creating a professional product. The site's name comes from the broad ideal of opening up the filmmaking process and making the tools available to a massive audience.

"The community will be able to vote on almost every aspect of the production," asserts Woo. "Projects like these live and die by their community... and we want to make sure that the community has a say in every step of the process."

The inaugural Massify project is the After Dark Films-backed *Ghosts in the Machine* contest. The process began earlier this year when community members created story pitches that the rest of the members read and rated. The pitching process is wide open, with pitches only having to conform to loose genre constructions.

Once a pitch is accepted, the person that pitched it will work alongside a professional screenwriter to bang out a finalized script while still taking input from the community. This input comes via message board suggestions, as well as through voting. The votes are sometimes weighted, so that community members who have received "karma" points from their contributions to the community have a stronger say in decisions.

While the script is being developed, audition tapes are submitted and voted on. The best submitters, as decided by members, are then flown to L.A. for a final set of auditions on the film's newly constructed



set, where another round of voting decides who stays and who goes. This stage should happen near the end of May, when pre-production on the film begins. The contest aspect of the film will be over, but the community will continue to contribute input through the website.

Because this is Massify's first project, certain things are being pre-selected outside the community to smooth the process, most notably the project's yet-to-be-announced director and title (film names proposed by entrants have included *Amish Zombie Tax Collectors From Mars!*, *Nothing at Stake* and *When the Children Cry*). "On subsequent projects we want to leave everything up to the community and be more hands-off," says Woo. "But since this is the first project, we needed to control more elements."

When everything is finished, After Dark Films will distribute the final product as part of its 2008 8 Films to Die For program, playing it in select theatres with other titles before releasing it on DVD.

"We saw this working perfectly with the horror community," says After Dark Films founder Courtney Solomon from London. "They love their genre and have such a sense of ownership over the material."

He adds with a laugh, "I see this as something fun for the audience. There's a power in numbers that might end up being a good thing. Or it might turn out poorly."

Dan Kazor

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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

✦ Poland boasts roughly 70 priests who are trained to perform exorcisms, while Italy has an estimated 300.

✦ Musician/singer Mike Patton (Faith No More, Mr. Bungle, Peeping Tom) did the voice work for the vampires in *I Am Legend*.

✦ Stephanie Conover, beauty queen and current Miss Toronto Plus title holder, was recently dismissed as a judge from the Miss Toronto Tourism pageant because she reads tarot cards. In a letter to Conover, pageant officials suggested that she uses the cards to "commune with dark forces."

✦ Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M For Murder* was shot in 3-D, but never released in that format.

✦ "Horripilation" is defined as "the bristling of the body hair, as from fear or cold" and is another term for "goose bumps."

✦ During an interview in 2007, director John Carpenter told *Rue Morgue* that he feels Blue Oyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper" is one of the ten best songs ever written.

✦ In January 2008, a package containing a human eye en route to a hospital for transplant was accidentally delivered to a hotel guest in Tasmania.

✦ Actor Paul Birch (*The Beast with a Million Eyes*) was so troublesome during the filming of Roger Corman's *Not of this Earth* that he was fired and replaced by a double who bore only a passing resemblance to him. According to co-star Dick Miller, this double appears in about one third of the scenes involving Birch's character.

✦ A partially mummified body was recently discovered in a dirt-filled bathtub in an abandoned, garbage-pocked Phoenix, Arizona apartment. Police believe the corpse may be that of a former tenant who hasn't been seen in seven years.

✦ Jack Nicholson and Marlon Brando were both considered by the producers of *The Exorcist* for the role of Father Damien Karras, but director William Friedkin didn't want an easily identifiable star and held out for Jason Miller.

✦ When the roommate of an elderly gentleman passed away sometime between five and eight years ago, his friend never reported the death. Instead, he left the corpse to decompose on the couch, while he continued to live alongside it in the Bristol, UK apartment they'd shared.

✦ Christopher Lee and Boris Karloff once lived next door to each other.

✦ Gunter von Hagens, creator of the human plastination technique and the travelling "Body Worlds" exhibit, is now selling plastinated human cross-sections to private citizens. Depending on the "slice" selected, prices range from 250 Euros to 12,000 Euros.

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



Instances of CRUSHED CRANIUMS



1. **The Toxic Avenger**
Weight machine melon-mashing
2. **Friday the 13th Part III**
Jason's eye-popping coconut clamp
3. **Hot Fuzz**
Falling rock dome disaster
4. **Death Race 2000**
Jo's belfry-bursting burn-out
5. **Irreversible**
Face extinguisher
6. **Riki-Oh: The Legend of Ricky**
Brain-bashing bell-ringer



Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
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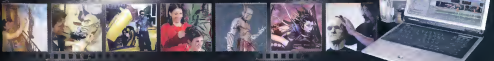
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When the sun sets,
there'll be a showdown.

HIGH MOON

A new webcomic series by
DAVID GALLAHER & STEVE ELLIS
Read it for free @ zudacomics.com



IN THE MID-1950s, PIN-UP GIRL TURNED ACTOR **MAILA NURMI** CREATED THE WORLD'S FIRST TV HORROR HOST, A PERSONA THAT PROVED TO BE AS WICKED A PRESENCE IN THE GENRE AS ULTIMATELY IT WAS TO HER CAREER. BEFORE HER PASSING EARLIER THIS YEAR, WE WERE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO GET THE FINAL WORD WITH THE **ORIGINAL GLAMOUR GHOUL**.

The Last Interview
With
VAMPIRA
by Dave Alexander

In this horror genre, women are seen much more often than they're heard. Look at the past 76 issues of *Rue Morgue* for proof: female images have been featured on the cover about 20 times, usually in a state of stress or undress. As far as cover stories go, in issue #20 *Ginger Snaps* writer Karen Valton was interviewed in tandem with director John Fawcett, issue #27 featured a round-table discussion with the women of *Evil Dead*, and issue #61 saw Antonella Fulci talking about her late father Lucia. If this is an accurate reflection of the genre over the past decade, then imagine what the climate was like 54 years ago when *Vampira* made her debut as the world's first television horror host.



It's no surprise then that she was rather solitary in her later years and professed to love animals more than people. This misanthropic image was perhaps tempered, though, by a resurgence in her popularity spurred on by both the resurrection of *Plan 9* as the best bad movie ever made and Tim Burton's 1994 feature *Ed Wood*, in which Lisa Marie played Vampira/Humma.

Nurmi modeled Mesdame Max was promoted as the new Vampira for a while, launched an official website and even got back in front of the camera. Appropriately, her last feature film appearance was in the 1998 Ed Wood-scripted *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died* (see p. 24).

Most recently, she was the subject of *Vampira: The Movie* (see p. 19). With the help of the film's director Kevin Sean Michaels and editor Alexa Anastasio, *Rue Morgue* interviewed Nurmi late last year. She passed away from natural causes shortly after this, on January 10, 2008, at age 85.

As those close to the outspoken, opinionated and sometimes caustic Nurmi attest, she had much to say about anything and everyone, and she could be her own worst enemy. She refused to compromise and was very guarded after several bad experiences in the entertainment industry (see p. 22). In many ways Malia Nurmi was a tragic, self-sabotaging figure punished for not playing by the rules.

Yet Vampira was a true trailblazer—the first TV horror host, beamed into people's homes as a mysterious, alluring mixture of sex, death and female empowerment. She tempered those uncomfortable notions with sharp wit and mesmerizing charm—her defining goth pin-up girl look and piercing gaze becoming something wickedly subversive in an era of staunch repression. After all, there just might be fangs hiding behind that smile...

But let's give Malia Nurmi the last word, as *Rue Morgue* pays tribute to a truly original horror personality, in Vampira's final interview.



Interview with Vampira, aka Malia Nurmi, by David J. Howe

Not that I know of. And it was not all my creation. Like when a chef makes a famous dish to eat, there is inventing and things he knows from history. Everything comes into the creation, my inspirations were manifold. I worked on it and some of it was accidental. Well, Morbica didn't have a name so I was "Mrs. Addams" at first, and that was what I was trying to sell. But when the local station brought me in they said they can't afford to do the whole Addams Family. So if it was going to be the one character, I had to change it. So I added the bondage and discipline. I was only going to emulate Morbica, but that became very different from Vampira. So the whole thing came together incidentally... the creature that she was. A Victorian, matronly dominatrix! A strange mixture. I didn't design that intellectually, it just came about.

Interview with Vampira, aka Malia Nurmi, by David J. Howe

Well, the first time that I went out at all was downtown in Los Angeles, and there were tall

buildings and office workers in them then. Office workers would have a break at lunch, and they would have to go out of the building and out on the street to get lunch, to a luncheonette, you know, because that was the way the world was structured here. So I knew, I was aware that the streets were crowded just like Manhattan, crowded with people walking to and from lunch, thousands of people, so we rented a car to tour the city and go down to Pershing Square. That's when the people let out at noon, right, so we were there when they got out of the offices, and the streets were suddenly crowded. My driver, who looked a little like an undertaker, pulled up in front and rolled a red carpet and I picked up a bouquet of lilies and walked in a trance, not seeing the people, over to [one of the statues in the Square] of my "beloved," put the flowers there and people were startled. They stopped and stared, they were frightened and they were mystified because I wasn't on the air yet. They didn't know what it was. And I tried to behave as though I was real, not a character in costume but a real strange woman who lives alone and who only comes out to leave flowers for somebody long dead. Then I got back in the car and he rolled up the red carpet and we left. Thousands of people were stunned, mystified, and then they took me to meet a Hollywood columnist. He was with one of the

Result of an attack: (top) to destroy Vampira's apartment by Ben J. Jones, posing as a hood of a crowd of men during photograph.



A NEW DOCUMENTARY CAPTURES THE FASCINATING AND OFTEN CONTROVERSIAL LIFE OF MAILA "VAMPIRA" NURMI.

Portrait of a DARK DIVA

by Paul Corupe



One of the most influential horror hosts of all time, Maila Nurmi was often just as mysterious in life as she was in death. *Vampira: The Movie*, a 2007 straight-to-DVD documentary by director Kevin Sean Michaels, features a wealth of captivating interview footage with Nurmi, as she discusses her career, relationships and personal outlook on life as a horror icon.

"My goal was to preserve Maila's essence in some way, so people could see what an afternoon was like with her," explains Michaels, a former art director for Thriller Entertainment. "Maila is the iconic horror host that all others would be judged against, yet very few would ever see. The weird thing is that her show was never seen outside of the Los Angeles area, so many of those who read the *LIFE* magazine article about her in 1954 had no idea what her TV show was really like. It seems bizarre that someone with a local show could get such national attention."

Michaels, who became a lifelong fan of Vampira after viewing Ed Wood's immortal trash classic *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, devotes the majority of the documentary to his interview with Nurmi, whose eccentric recollections are the high point of the low-budget production. Throughout the film, Nurmi's unfiltered personality shines, even though Michaels admits that getting her to talk about certain topics could be difficult, including her relationships with Marlon Brando and James Dean. "Maila was guarded sometimes and very free at other times. One example is the story she tells about how the Vampira makeup was so intimidating that her boyfriend wouldn't have sex with her, and she had to 'rape a doorknob.' It's like, 'What did she just say?'"

Always quick with unexpected and controversial quips, Nurmi dishes out several contentious claims throughout the film, stating that she had a worldwide fan club after Vampira's quick rise to fame, how she was the "first woman in California to wear backless shoes" and the way she believes she was blacklisted by Hollywood following her stint as Vampira. According to Michaels, that's just part of the fun when trying to decipher Nurmi's larger-than-life persona.

"I've gotten some flak for including some of the statements she made, but it's kind of like Ripley's Believe or Not—people who watch the doc are smart enough to decide what's true and what seems like distortion," he says. "I



came to learn that Maila exaggerated things if it bolstered the point she was trying to make. It was obvious to me that the truth was bent over time, and she really believed what she said, so to her, these things were true."

Another highlight of the documentary are the few clips from Vampira's horror hosting duties on KABC-TV, which Michaels says are taken from a rare 1954 16mm promotional short from the station's vaults. "The Vampira part runs only two minutes—there's all that exists. There's a great cobweb-filled opening sequence and then Maila introduces *The Thelwell Guest*, which is not a horror movie. KABC-TV rented only films that they could obtain for \$100 or less, so a big percentage of the movies Vampira showed were film noir, not horror, as people believe."

Providing some much-needed context for Vampira's rise to fame, several other interview subjects are included in the proceedings, such as Forrest J. Ackerman and noted horror expert David J. Skal. Brief tributes from fellow horror hosts Zachery, Penny Dreadful and Svengoolie are also included, along with horror convention regulars such as Sid Haig and Bill Moseley. Especially interesting, however, is Cassandra Peterson's level-headed defense of her alter ego, Elvira, to Nurmi's accusations of plagiarism—just one of several controversies that Nurmi doesn't talk about with Michaels.

"Everyone has heard about the lawsuit between Vampira and Elvira, and some felt it was a scabious decision to put Elvira in there," he admits. "But why not give someone a minute or two to explain their viewpoint?"

Currently available on DVD from Alpha Video, *Vampira: The Movie* may not quite be the definitive word on the original glamour ghoul, but its eccentric portrait of Nurmi's unique personal history in horror will no doubt help maintain her eerie appeal, even from the great beyond. **A**



On the Set of *Plan 9 From Outer Space*: (left to right) Vampira, Tor Johnson, Beth Lugad replacement Tom Mason and Crowell and (above) Maila Nurmi (photo by Gabrielle Gelandwerk).



I DON'T
LIKE TO SEE VIOLENCE
OR THINK ABOUT IT.
I LIKE VINTAGE HORROR.
I LIKE NOSFERATU.



MAILA NURMI



Address at the Mannerheim Institute, Helsinki, Finland
Interviewed from April 30, 1994 through May 7, 1994
and dubbed a complete look-in-the-camera since 1984

big newspapers... I knew him personally well; when I was a hair check girl he was a regular customer of mine, maybe two years earlier. So now I was not revealing my identity beneath all the makeup, you know. So my producer said, "Well I'm bringing a woman for you to interview and you know her, but I'm not telling you who she is, so you have to figure that out." I was brought into his office and he couldn't figure out who I was. He said, "I don't know you." I said, "Indeed you do, you know me very well." He tried to figure it out but he couldn't for the life of him. We had a dinner date at Ciro's, and he still couldn't figure out who I was. I finally said who I was and he said, "No, you're not her; she's a Russian princess." He was one of my favourite columnists. Even when *LIFE* magazine interviewed me, they called me by my full name... Maria Syyrjänen, the name on my birth certificate. He still couldn't believe that it was I, Maila Nurmi, the most publicized person besides President Eisenhower. It felt like that.

When I was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1954, I was the first time that a local TV show had developed fan clubs all over the world. It had never happened before and the paparazzi were much smaller and I didn't have any paparazzi to speak of, but lots and lots of [promotional] photography, and just from the still photographs they got excited. All kinds of people, all over the world.

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I was hypnotizing the camera. It was like home cooking. I would tell the cameraman to come closer, closer, closer. And I would tell him to just

focus in on my eyes, and then I'd stare into the camera and pretend I was staring into the eyes of my lover. And I am a hypnotist. I hypnotized silently without saying anything. "You're fascinated. You're fascinated. You'll come back to the camera, you'll come back to the camera," I was saying silently. People would have parties on Saturday nights, and they'd turn on *The Vampire Show* and not listen; they'd have it on in the bedroom so people could be entertaining themselves in the living room and somebody would be stationed listening in the bedroom and tell everyone when the commercials were going on and they'd come in to see the commercial. And then the newspapers were writing about that, how people were running in to see the show. I was hypnotizing them and they didn't know it — physically, mentally intending to do it. Not just generating it, but deliberately intending to do it. Maybe that was part of it, staring into the camera that way. I had been for fifteen years before that a monologist, so I knew how to handle my crowds. So I was handling my crowds. Or trying to, and I guess it was working.

When I was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1954, I was the first time that a local TV show had developed fan clubs all over the world. It had never happened before and the paparazzi were much smaller and I didn't have any paparazzi to speak of, but lots and lots of [promotional] photography, and just from the still photographs they got excited. All kinds of people, all over the world.

I think I might have. Not at the time that I knew about, but I squeezed and stretched and dieted and it probably wore out my digestive tract. Four years in all. I am not as healthy as I was then. But no doctor has ever said that, although I abused my intestines. People my age

have some digestive disorders anyway so I don't know how much was due to squeezing. I never did have had a rib removed, as some people say. I did not. I have a peculiar bone structure that is a wide and low rib cage and nothing underneath and the hip bones are very wide. So the waist looked that much slimmer by comparison. Nothing there, nearly nonexistent.

When I was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1954, I was the first time that a local TV show had developed fan clubs all over the world. It had never happened before and the paparazzi were much smaller and I didn't have any paparazzi to speak of, but lots and lots of [promotional] photography, and just from the still photographs they got excited. All kinds of people, all over the world.

Oh, well you mean the article after James Dean's death? The woman who wrote that article was writing for a scandal magazine, *Whisper* magazine, and it was all lies. She was called by America's foremost criminal attorney for slander. A whole bunch of young Hollywood starlets got together and had a suit against the magazine and





You know the cover photo for the [DVD] box? That was the end of *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, that was the final shot. Ed Wood said, "You have to walk toward the camera in an alpha-state and when you get to it SCREAM!" I was startled by the camera. And that's better horror than when a monster goes "Boo." That doesn't compare to this. When the monster is frightened, the monster is out of control. That's dangerous. That's scary to me. That picture was taken when I was actually scared. Coming out of my alpha-state, startled. That's a good photograph.

Ed Wood: The Director Who Made the Worst Movie Ever Made by *Tim League* (Simon & Schuster, \$24.95)

Lilith stole Eve away from Adam. She was the first woman with that instinct. To seduce away another one's love, just to see them crushed, to be superior to her – that's who Vampira is in another incarnation. I am just the opposite of that. I have never to my knowledge ever dated a married man or even one with a steady girlfriend. I am too moral for that. I am a prey creature.

Ed Wood: The Director Who Made the Worst Movie Ever Made by *Tim League* (Simon & Schuster, \$24.95)

they said one woman did 90% of the writing and it was 90% lies. The CIA escorted the writer to the Mexican border and [she] was told that as long as she lived she could not step foot in the US. There were many stars that were maligned in that magazine. She wrote the article, and it, of course, was humbug.

Ed Wood: The Director Who Made the Worst Movie Ever Made by *Tim League* (Simon & Schuster, \$24.95)

I don't know why he wanted Vampira, but when I first found out, it was from an article in the newspaper. At the time, three major movie picture companies wanted to do a movie with me. The story would have Vampira as the central figure. I was owned 49% by my little station and they said no to all of them, for what reason I don't know. There was a bidding war for my services as a leading lady in major motion pictures. Then I read in an article that this little jerk was going to make a movie and wanted Vampira. I said, "How dare he, how dare he!" I'd worked so hard to try to get up to where I am from the bottom of the ladder, and now he was going to pull me down into the slap with him! "That stupid little no-talent," is what I thought. So I said, "that ignorant man." I was incensed. That was my initial reaction. Oh, whatever.

Ed Wood: The Director Who Made the Worst Movie Ever Made by *Tim League* (Simon & Schuster, \$24.95)

I am not a moviegoer. I like black and white movies. I detest colour. Soft colours are nice; everything else feels like razor blades on my eyeballs. I hate the high-definition colour that they use now. But I do watch television. So there are classic movies that I'd love to see, our [local] motion picture theatre is out of business. I never say to someone, "Let's go see a movie." I would be dragged by my first husband to see movies. He was a screenwriter. And we'd go every Saturday night to see the new biggie. Cowboys were big in those days. How I hated it. I would go to the ladies room and sit in the lobby and watch people because to me that was interesting. Universal energy. People dressing a certain way and buying buttered popcorn. I wanted to know why people wanted to buy popcorn. I wanted to know the real pure psychology of life, not earned imagination. I always found their imagination pale to my own, so it was boring to watch. But no, I have not been a moviegoer of my own volition. Especially today's horror movies, which are not horror, they're violence. I don't like to see violence or think about it. I like vintage horror. I like *Nosferatu*.

He hardly ever mentioned Vampira. I don't know what year he started *Famous Monsters*. He was a big Vampira fan and a personal friend of mine. But I was blacklisted very quickly and everyone avoided me. Forry did not. He was hanging around anyway. Until one day he dropped out of my life and pretended that he never heard of me. Vampira had the same opening as I did, she said, "Hello my name is Vampira, but you may call me Vampy." I originally said that I was Vampy; they had the same wordage. And the article that he sold to *Harris Publications* was exactly the same thing we were doing on my show. He stole the whole thing for \$25. How valuable he deemed them to be! He claims to have created that character which is disgusting and shameful. He is not a very creative man, but

Famous Monsters: A 2007 picture of Milla Jovovich by Stefano G. Scimemi and showing a publicity shot of Vampira



DANA GOULD, COMEDIAN, ACTOR AND EMMY AWARD-WINNING WRITER FOR *THE SIMPSONS*, WAS ALSO ONE OF MAILA NURMI'S CLOSEST FRIENDS IN HER LATER YEARS. HE EXPOSES THE COLOURFUL, COMPASSIONATE ARTIST BEHIND THE COOL VENEER OF WHITE MAKEUP AND BLACK DRESSES.

In the Shadow of VAMPIRA

by Dana Gould

Actors who become identified with iconic characters often refer to it as a blessing and a curse. This is especially true of actors in the genre. Bela Lugosi spent his whole life trying in vain to escape Dracula's typecasting clutches. In the end, he was even buried wearing the Count's cape. Leonard Nimoy's love/hate relationship with Mr. Spock has been well documented, often by Nimoy himself, in the books *I Am Not Spock* and its later refutation *I Am Spock*. But never have the roles of actor and character been so intricately intertwined as in the strange case of Maila Nurmi and her alter ego, TV's original "Glamour Ghoul," Vampira.

The story of Vampira's origins has been told many times. In 1953, young Maila Nurmi attends Lester Horton's Bal Canbe, a popular Los Angeles costume ball, dressed as the morose housewife from Charles Addams'

comic strip in *The New Yorker*. Twelve years later, the strip makes it to television as *The Addams Family*, but by then the character had undergone a peculiar transformation. Now named Morticia, she bears a striking resemblance to... well, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Maila takes first prize at the ball and comes to the attention of a TV producer named Hunt Stromberg, Jr., who asks her to recreate the getup on local station KABC, hosting late-night, grade-Z horror flicks. Maila, despite being broke and looking to jump-start her career, turns him down. Not wanting to rip-off Charles Addams, she steals off into the night and creates her own character: "Vampira."

Maila once published a "Recipe for Vampira," revealing the character to be a cocktail of screen sirens Theda Bara, Norma Desmond, Tallulah Bankhead, Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich and the aforementioned Morticia, all gussied up in clingy, black fetish wear. It's an accurate description, missing one obvious ingredient, a big dollop of an ambitious young pin-up model and aspiring actress named Maila Nurmi.

This Glamour Ghoul appeared on the cultural landscape of the all-white world of *Happy Days* and *Howdy Doody*, certainly no place for a strong-willed, acid-tongued hepcat hottie who fooled around town in an old hearse sneering, "I sign epitaphs, not autographs." Though known as a horror icon now, Vampira, like Maila Nurmi herself, was just a beatnik chick at heart.

Vampira was so identified with the beat culture of poets, writers, artists, jazzbos and other be-boppin' me'er-do-wells that came boiling out of New York's Greenwich Village in the late 1940s that the early ads for her show read like a primer on hipster slang: "Dig this real nervous devil doll every Saturday at the stroke of twelve, midnight, as she screens some long gone films as KABC-TV's Lady of Horrors..." (For those who would like to get a look at the real deal, a small clip of the original *The Vampira Show* can be found floating around YouTube.)



The headquarters of beat culture in LA (or "The Coast" as they called it then) was a swinging, all-night coffee shop on the Sunset Strip called Google's. One group of regulars so dominated the scene they had their own name, the Night Watch. The charter members included doomed matinee idol James Dean, actor Jack Simmons and Maia Nuri.

Maia was an incredibly funny lady, and beatnik humour, known as "sick jokes" at the time, was a huge part of *The Vampira Show*: "People ask me why I don't have electricity in my pad," she would deadpan to camera. "Silly. Everyone knows electricity is for chams." This brand of dark humour was all the rage at the time, and it became personified on stage in the form of one Brother Theodore, a particular favourite of Nuri's.

Born Theodore Gotthelf, a German Jew who literally bought his way out of Dachau, Brother Theodore was a comedian and monologist who gained fame performing dark, Grand Guignol-esque horror-comedy monologues in long-running midnight shows at various New York theatres (he also played creepy Uncle Reuben Klopke in 1989's *The Dumbst*). His best stuff – "I gazed into the abyss, the abyss gazed into me, and neither one of us liked what we saw" – paints him as something of a spiritual sibling to Vampira. Later in life, Maia would entertain friends by leaving Brother Theodore nuggets on their answering machines, without even a "hello" or "good-bye."

It's ironic, therefore, that this bright, colourful person is primarily known for her "hole" in 1959's *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, a movie in which she mostly staggers mately through a cardboard graveyard, I first discovered the film when it resurfaced as a so-bad-it's-good classic in the mid-1980s. I was an aspiring comedian and thought it was the funniest movie I had ever seen. I was also a monster kid and appreciated, let's just say, the Bela Lugosi of it all.

Ten years later, I was living in Los Angeles, working as a comedian and looking for a way to satisfy my monster jones. Produced in 1995, *The Big Scary Movie Show* was my version of *The Vampira Show*; only instead of a wise-cracking, goth'd-up fetish model, the show would be hosted by a dumpy, white guy in an old suit. Wanting to kick off the festivities in style, my first guest was the original Lady of Horrors, Vampira herself, Maia Nuri.

I had been warned that she was very private, reclusive and wary of strangers. Years ago, immediately after the death of James Dean, a gossip magazine ran an article that insinuated Maia had put a curse on Dean, and that was the cause of his car accident. What occurred in reality was a sad coincidence that was misinterpreted and exploited.

During a Vampira photo shoot, Maia had posed in front of an open grave at The Hollywood Forever

Cemetery. She took the photo, scribbled, "Darling, come and join me!" across it and sent it to Dean as a joke. When the police investigating the accident entered his apartment, they found the postcard; it was passed on to *Whisper* magazine, which made up the curse story with the "James Dean's Black Madonnas" headline, insinuating that Maia was a witch. Some lunatic James Dean fans took it very seriously and began peppered Maia with death threats. This trauma, piggy-backed upon the death of her close friend, shook her deeply, and affected her approach to new people for the rest of her life.

Although I had no idea what to expect, I found Maia quite charming and funny. I wanted to thank her for helping me launch the show but, despite it being 1995, she didn't have a phone ("Ugh! Awful thing!"), so I wrote her a thank you letter. She wrote me back and we became pen pals of a sort. This evolved into a genuine friendship and, though my time was limited, with a wife and family, I greatly enjoyed our back-and-forth.

I finally convinced Maia to get a telephone and she began to let her guard down. Over time, I realised how hard she worked at keeping up with who she thought she was supposed to be. The classic wag, so willing to dish, was a smokescreen. It was the show the public expected and she was honour-bound to oblige. In reality, she liked her life quiet and uneventful. She stayed up on the events of the world, had a friend or two from the old days, would paint and write letters – "a not-so-starving, starving artist's life."

One can even track down a film called *The Beat Generation*, a 1950s cops-and-robbers potboiler where Maia plays a snide beat chick, slyly reading a nasty little poem called "Dear Parents" in a smoke-filled coffeehouse. She is basically playing herself, dressed in sneakers, jeans and a sweater, her blonde hair a short-cropped, casual mess, but she is billed as Vampira.

And therein lies the rub. It's difficult to find where Maia Nuri ends and Vampira begins, which possibly explains why she felt so wronged when Cassandra Peterson assumed the character of Elvira in the 1980s. It's well established that Maia was approached to help re-launch *The Vampira Show*, with a new Vampira, and that somewhere along the way there was a falling out. Maia claimed to have been fired from the project, based on her refusal to



surrender the rights to the character, wanting instead to maintain ownership of the copyright. It's a common practice and an indisputably wise business decision, but it cuts much deeper. Vampira was a lot more than just a character Maia created. Vampira was very much a part of Maia herself, and she couldn't have given her away if she wanted to.

There were differences of course. Where Vampira was cold and aloof, Maia was deeply compassionate. Vampira surrounded herself with Victorian splendour; Maia, bohemian to the end, slept on the couch, having turned her bedroom into a painting studio. Vampira had a pet spider, Rolo, who drove her to distraction; Maia lovingly took in strays of any and all variety, claiming even to have a pigeon that made regular visits.

Maia Nuri and Vampira. Separate entities, hopelessly entwined. And so they lived, until the night of January 10, 2008, when they joined hands for one last time and disappeared into the mist forever. There is one crucial difference. Vampira will live on. Maia Nuri will be missed.



Maia as a Beatnik poet in *The Beat Generation* (1955), opposite bottom; (overleaf) Drew Good: Film poster for *Plan 9 From Outer Space* and opposite *Beat Generation* (1955).

MAILA NURMI'S FINAL FEATURE FILM
APPEARANCE REUNITED HER WITH ED WOOD
TWENTY YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH.

I Woke Up Early The Day I Died

by Dave Alexander

It was made exactly the way Edward D. Wood Jr. would've wanted it, and that meant a part for Vampira.

"She's part of the Ed Wood crew, and I made sure that whoever was around [from that crew] got a part—Eddie operated a family system," explains Aris Iliopoulos, director of *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died*, the movie that Wood spent eight years writing but never got to make before dying in 1978, at age 54.

For the 1988 film, shot nearly 30 years after her now-famous communist-like role in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, Maila Nurmi did not appear in-character as Vampira this time, but as a hard-core reading madam at a flophouse who pimps out her granddaughter (played by Christine Ricci).

"When I found out that Vampira was available and was gonna play the part, we designed a character and she jumped into it immediately," recalls Iliopoulos.

Appropriately, like her role in *Plan 9*, this part was also played silently. As was Wood's wont, no one's heard talking in the entire movie; there's just off-screen narration, sound effects and a bizarre soundtrack.

"His goal was to make a movie without dialogue, a really successful movie," says Iliopoulos. "It was his masterpiece. [Ed's widow] Kathy Wood told me that he loved that script so much that one time they had a fire at their house while Eddie was sleeping in bed. He jumped out of the window; he was not wearing anything, but the first thing he grabbed was the screenplay. He used it to cover himself up!"

Working with Muse Productions, Iliopoulos secured a cast of like-minded Wood fans, notably co-producer Billy Zane (*Demon Night*, *Titanic*, *Bloodrayne*), who stars as Ed Wood look-alike "The Thief," a noise-sensitive escapee from a mental institution. After assailing a nurse and, in true Ed Wood-style, dressing up in her clothes, he embarks on a crime spree involving stolen loot that goes missing in a coffin. Along for the ride are not just Ed Wood alumni Nurmi, Kathy Wood and Conrad Brooks, but a long list of Hollywood actors including Ron Perlman, John Ritter, Karen Black, Tippi Hedren, Eartha Kitt, Andrew McCarthy, Bud Cort, Tara Reid and Sandra Bernhard.

Iliopoulos points out that Nurmi, despite a mere four days on set, stood out more than most. "We were on the set [when] she took me aside and showed me her hands and said, 'You see this? These are the ones I wore in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*—the red nails she was wearing, she had made those herself out of red Tupperware from the '50s, and I thought that was quite amusing.'"

As *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died* was touring the festival circuit—where it received mixed reviews, mainly for its bizarre concept—its distributor went bankrupt and the movie was never released in North America. Iliopoulos says that's about to change, as a special edition DVD release is planned for this spring, and Vampira fans can get a look at her final feature film performance. (Her final onscreen appearance is in the 2007 John 5 instructional guitar video *The Devil Knows My Name*, directed by Rob Zombie, bassist and friend of Nurmi's Peggy D, available at john5.com)

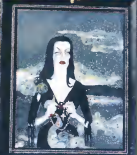
"I think she's one of the jewels of the movie," affirms Iliopoulos. "She was quite the character." ■

Maila Nurmi in *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died*
photo by Chris Markey

he is a very bright man for finding talent. He found many gifted people.

I was looking for a new Vampira in 1980. I couldn't play it. I think she has to be 34, the age that she is. I (originally) played her three years older than I was. I felt that she had to be in early middle age because that is more appealing to men than a woman who doesn't know anything yet. To have the woman who has the beauty of youth but with some of the wisdom that has been accrued. A woman is in her peak of beauty at 35. It doesn't have to be me at all. I didn't want to do it again myself in 1980. I wanted someone else to do it and they couldn't find anyone. I certainly wasn't going to do it when I was 58 years-old. I wouldn't do that again.

I haven't done anything now for several years. I've been drawing since I was a very little kid. Laying on my stomach in the living room the way people do. I'd ask my mother, "What should I do now?" And she'd say to shut up. But I was doing something with my creative energy. I was an artist, doodling. I was never a trained artist. I was gifted with imagination and courage and that's about it.





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WHILE MOST PARANORMAL INVESTIGATION SHOWS EMPLOY COLOURFUL MEDIUMS, INCONCLUSIVE VIDEO FOOTAGE AND OTHER SUSPECT TACTICS, THE SKEPTICS OF **GHOST HUNTERS** TRY THEIR DAMNEDST TO EXPLAIN THE SEEMINGLY UNEXPLAINABLE — WITH SOMETIMES SURPRISING RESULTS.



THE REAL GHOST BUSTERS

BY CLAIRE HORSNELL

Spectres, shadows, spine-chilling cold spots — it's all in a day's work for The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS), members of which also do double duty as the stars of the hit Sci-Fi Channel series *Ghost Hunters*. But unlike much of their competition, they don't claim to be spiritualists, psychics or clairvoyants — or even keep any on staff. In fact, Steve Gonsalves, the show's technical manager and evidence analyst, partially credits the success of *Ghost Hunters* to the fact that the TAPS team are really just regular folk.

"Five or six years ago, paranormal investigators looked a lot different than your everyday person," he explains. "They would wear outlandish clothes, they would even have crazy hair — that's what people were used to seeing. Then we came along and people said, 'Wow, here's all these regular dudes.' We've got a cop, we've got plumbers, we had a teacher, an engineer — you know, just regular, everyday people."

Sure enough, TAPS was founded in 1990 by Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson, two Warwick, Rhode Island plumbers-turned-paranormal investigators.

As the TAPS organization grew, and eventually launched *Real Paranormal*, more staffers were brought on board, including a formal case manager, several additional investigators and, of course, Gonsalves. Then came the TV show.

"The team did a case where we were able to disprove the haunting," says Gonsalves of the show's origin. "At this particular case there was a New York Times writer along with the team. The story went out in the *New York Times*, then over the wire. From that story, many production companies contacted TAPS, and Jason and Grant chose one to work with, Pilgrim Films and Television (which is) also responsible for *Survivor*, *Dirty Jobs*, *The Ultimate Fighter*, *American Chopper* and many others."

Luckily, all this success didn't go to their heads, and as a result TAPS continues to be staffed by average Joes. Their awesome arsenal of technical equipment and passion for the paranormal may set them apart somewhat, but perhaps not in the way one might suspect. The TAPS members, unlike many so-called paranormal investigators, are extremely wary of attributing



The Ghost Guys: TAPS founders Jason Hawes (left) and Grant Wilson (right), (below) TAPS Paranormal magazine, and (opposite) technical manager/evidence analyst Steve Gonsalves.

otherworldly influences to the strange occurrences they examine, however, they're not about to rule out the existence of ghosts either.

"I definitely believe, but I'm not here to make anybody else believe," states Gonsalves, who became interested in the paranormal after watching horror movies as a child and wondering if any of the unexplained phenomena that occurred in them was real. "I tell everybody, 'Please don't believe. Have your own experiences and make up your own mind.' For myself, I don't believe anything I haven't seen with my own eyes ... I think everybody should be that way."

Each episode of *Ghost Hunters* covers two investigations taken on by the TAPS team. A typical investigation includes spending the night at the site of the apparent paranormal activity and gathering evidence. From there, the evidence is analyzed thoroughly before any findings are presented to the clients—which have included homeowners, restaurant managers and, in one case, military personnel.

Basically, if you're having trouble with something potentially paranormal, you can call the Society and they'll send out a team equipped with electro-magnetic frequency (EMF) gauges, video and audio recording equipment, thermometers and a ton of other high-tech devices that measure what's actually going on in the area—surges in electrical force, changes in temperature, inexplicable noises, etc. They then spend another night reviewing the data they've collected in an attempt to uncover scientific explanations for what they've found. Leaking power sockets or microwave ovens can cause spikes in EMF, for example, while

a drafty window may be the culprit behind a perceived cold spot. Gonsalves says that this balanced and skeptical approach is another reason that *Ghost Hunters* has been so successful.

"We were the first paranormal show to come out into the public as a group that disproves hauntings," says Gonsalves. "People had never seen that before. People didn't think that even existed. ... We're trying to disprove them, because we know that once you've disproved them, the one single bit that you can't disprove is where your possible paranormal activity may lie."

Surprisingly, TAPS doesn't charge for its services (but will accept donations to cover travel costs and other expenses), and if they do encounter something they can't explain, the team will sit down with the client and discuss what to do next. Gonsalves admits that many clients are surprisingly cool about discovering they have apparently genuine supernatural activity in their homes.

"You'd be surprised, a lot of clients just want to know if they're crazy or not," says Gonsalves. "So that's what we tell them. 'We found real evidence here, you're not crazy. So as long as you're not scared, we'll just leave it.' We suit our techniques to the client. For instance, if the client is very religious, then we'll recommend they have clergy come in, call priests in, do blessings, anoint the window sills—you know, do everything they need to do to free the house. That may work or it may

not work. But if that's what the client wants, then that's the first step we'll take."

One of the most productive techniques they use in their investigations is the recording of electronic voice phenomena (EVP)—the inexplicable appearance of voices on sound recordings that weren't apparent when the recordings were being made. Various theories have been offered to explain EVP: one theory purports they're ghosts, another suggests that they're psychokinetic transmissions from living beings, while others think they're the result of pareidolia—essentially, the investigators hearing what they want to hear on the tapes.

Gonsalves elaborates: "A lot of skeptics will say, 'Okay, these voices that you're getting, that are supposedly voices from the other side—people that have passed, ghosts, whatever you want to call them? You know you could be picking up a rogue television transmission or a rogue phone call or voices from outside the room.' And they're right: how do we know that that's not true?"

He goes on to explain that another potential issue with EVP is something called "pattern recognition" (also known as *matrixing*), the process by which the human brain seeks to extrapolate the familiar from the unfamiliar. Next time you see a gnarled face in the bark of an old tree, for example, you can rest safe in the knowledge that your brain is *matrixing* properly.

As such, the team have put a series of safeguards in place to reduce the chances of that happening with their recordings.

"Every single noise that we hear, we tag," says Gonsalves. "So if we're doing EVP work and we hear a door open outside, we say, 'Hey, a door just opened.' If we hear someone else talking in another room, we'll say into the recorder, 'There's a voice coming from outside the room.' We do that with everything that we hear; that way, when we're analyzing, we don't say, 'Hey, those are

voices? Are those ghostly footsteps?'"

The team also runs question-and-answer EVP sessions, where they'll ask specific questions such as, "What is your name?" and see what turns up on the tape.

"When you get [a] direct answer, it would be a huge, huge coincidence if the second that happens, you just so happen to pick up a conversation," explains Gonsalves. "What year were you born?" '1971.'

What would be the chances of a television station at that second saying "1971"? Not that it counts it out one hundred percent, but it helps us when we bring that to skeptics, and we do that with every kind of evidence we collect."

Yet, some skeptics, such as Joe Nickell, Senior Research Fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and winner of the American Humanists Association's 2004 Isaac Asimov Science award, still distrust paranormal investigators who attempt



RUE MORGUE INVESTIGATES THE **BEST** AND **WORST** OF GHOST-HUNTING ON TV.



CAUGHT ON TELEVISION

BY CLAIRE HORSNELL

DEAD FAMOUS

A believer and a doubler investigating the paranormal? That's the concept behind Living TV's *Dead Famous*, in which clairvoyant Chirle Fleming and skeptic Gail Porter travel around America investigating places where famous dead people, including Marilyn Monroe, JFK, Jim Morrison and the like are said to still hang out. Episodes feature three locations associated with each particular celebrity, though some of their connections are comically tenuous at best.

MYSTERY HUNTERS

In many ways a younger version of *Ghost Hunters*, this Discovery Kids show features two teenagers, Christina Broccolini and Araya Mengesha, who use science to try to rationalize all sorts of weirdness, including vampires, UFOs and a hefty helping of ghosts.

SCARIEST PLACES ON EARTH

You'd think that it'd be an excellent day for an exorcism when presenter Linda Blair teamed up with narrator Zelda Rubenstein for the show (on ABC Family), which detailed hauntings in the United States and around the world. Unfortunately, in 2000 the show was accused of fabricating photographs, newspaper clippings and even an interview for a segment on the Villisca axe murders in Iowa. All told, this pretty much threw a bee through the window of this show's credibility.

GHOSTHUNTERS

Not to be confused with *Ghost Hunters*, this British forerunner ran between 1996 and 1997 on the Discovery Channel. Rather than focussing on the investigations of a single team, presenter Ian Cashmore interviewed professors working in the

field of parapsychology, and the show featured a selection of their best evidence. Cashmore also appeared in the pilot of the American version of *Ghost Hunters*, but then decided to pursue other projects.

JANE GOLDMAN INVESTIGATES

Novelist, screenwriter and "Gothic Goddess" Jane Goldman lightheartedly scrutinizes rumours of hauntings, as well as exploring other occult stuff such as reading tarot cards and casting horoscopes for Living TV. Goldman herself is an essay winner for the "Best Hair in the Genre of Ghost-Hunting TV" award.

THE GIRLY GHOSTHUNTERS

This slightly surreal Canadian reality show for SPACE was aimed at younger viewers and follows a female team of young investigators who hunt

ghosts with the assistance of pendulums, cameras, audio equipment... and a large garden gnome called Gnomie, who (the girls' website tells us) doubles as both a mascot and a handy weapon should you attempt to sneak up on them in the dark.

SIGHTINGS

One of the first shows to deal with the paranormal in depth, *Sightings* ran from 1982 to 1987 on the Sci Fi Channel and handled hauntings, as well as a multitude of other unexplained happenings such as crop circles and UFOs. It was eventually refashioned into the show *Unexplained Mysteries*, which was broadcast in 2003.

SOUTHERN HAUNTS

A PBS show with a more traditional documentary format, *Southern Haunts* visits various haunted locations in the southern United States, filling viewers in on their respective histories and interviewing the people who claim to have experienced the local ghosts themselves. Mel-low as a well-aged bourbon, it may not have the drama of the team-based shows, but it's fascinating nonetheless.

GHOSTWATCH

Rather than being accused of faking TV footage to make it look more real, the producers of 1992's *Ghostwatch* put together a drama so realistic that many people had a *War of the Worlds*-esque response to it. Although writing credits were prominently displayed during the show's opening, it was broadcast in a slot reserved for drama, and while several TV listings printed *Ghostwatch*'s cast list prior to its airing, casual viewers were treated to the sight of well-known BBC presenters playing themselves in an apparently "live" broadcast from a haunted location. The show had even been promoted as a "ghost hunt" rather than a drama by presenter Sarah Greene on one of her other vehicles, the children's show *Going Live*. The tabloids had a field day with this; the *British Medical Journal* documented two case studies of children who had to be treated for post-traumatic stress disorder after watching *Ghostwatch*; and one newspaper reported that a teenager had committed suicide as a direct result of viewing the show.

THE ANTIQUES GHOST SHOW

For one season only (2003, Living TV), former British footballer and TV psychic Derek Acorah examined people's heirlooms and told them about their ancestors. Acorah's alleged tenden-



Ghostwatch: (left to right) Gordon Smith, Yvette Fielding and David Wells, and (right) Jane Goodwin

cies towards spontaneous violent possession and (ahem) channeling the spirits of fictitious people are said to have gotten him kicked off *Most Haunted*—although there continues to be some disagreement about whether he left because his contract ran out or because he was making things up.

I'M FAMOUS AND FRIGHTENED

This godawful UK show has "celebrities" stay for three nights in a haunted castle in Northumberland, raising money for charity by undertaking "terrifying" challenges. The cast list reads like a *Who's Nobody* of British TV from the '80s, but if you're a Brit and you've ever wondered what Keith Chegwin's up to these days, here's your answer.

PARANORMAL STATE

Demon stalkers, hand-held cameras and high production values—all in a day's work for the cute college kids of the Penn State Paranormal Research Society. Lead investigator Ryan Buell was allegedly haunted by a demon named Belial, one of the devilish anti-stars of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. (No one's ever possessed by low-status entities, but that's demonic infestation for you.) As of January 2008, however, Belial has suspended his TV career and Ryan has declared himself officially fiend-free, which has proven fortunate for the team members who had allegedly been attacked by Belial as he tried to get at Buell. Why Buell should be the focus of his attentions has never been made clear, since various critics have described him as "not that compelling" and his team as "glibble." The A&E Network show has also been criticized for focusing on style rather than substance, and the fact that they refer to demons as "bunnies" is one of the scariest things about it.

CREEPY CANADA

While *Creepy Canada* purported to be "an investigation of paranormal activity in the Great White North," the show drew a fair amount of criticism for sneaking several hearty American spirits into the mix as well. The producers ended up putting a slightly apologetic (and somehow oh-so-Canadian) explanation on their website, emphasizing that they tried to focus on places near the Canadian border, since lots of Canadians travel to the U.S. and that the production team that filmed the offending segments travelled to the cross-border locations in an uncomfortable van, just to make sure they couldn't go too far. (Best direct quote regarding this minor scandal: "Viewers in Newfoundland and Labrador, we will continue to go to you, since you aren't close to anything.") *Creepy Canada* aired from 2002 to 2006 and is currently on hiatus, possibly due to the fact that in large parts of Canada, it's difficult to tell a supernatural cold spot from a spot where it's just bloody cold.

MOST HAUNTED

Presenter Yvette Fielding travels the UK, spending nights in purportedly haunted locations looking for signs of ghosts. Less tech-savvy than *Ghost Hunters*, these folks employ psychics and table-tipping once in a while, yet the show still has a strangely down-to-earth vibe, compounded by Brits muttering things like, "Well, bugger me!" and "That was bloody odd." That said, skeptical investigator Will Storr (of *Will Storr vs. the Supernatural*, *RM663*) visited the set and discovered a secret schedule of "happenings" slated to occur during one show's live broadcast. However, Storr couldn't explain a sudden and dramatic power drain to battery-powered equipment...

DO SOME SUPERNATURAL SLEUTHING OF
YOUR OWN IN THE LOST CROWN.

ARMCHAIR GHOST HUNTING

THE LOST CROWN:
A GHOST-HUNTING ADVENTURE

PG

Got Game Entertainment

A town with a secret, a bevy of hauntings and a hidden treasure? What more could an intrepid puzzle-loving video gamer need from a budget-priced title? How 'bout a challenge?

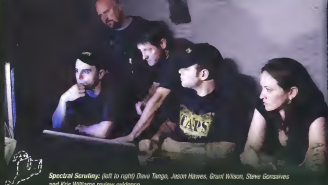
As you begin this point-and-click *Myst*-style game, your life and purpose is almost as big a mystery as the isolated British coastal town that you find yourself dropped off outside of. Through documents you discover on your person, you learn that you're Nigel Danvers, and that you're on the run (with stolen research) from the company that used to employ you. Thing is, Hidden Industries is a lot more like Big Brother than you ever suspected and they know exactly where you've fled to, and now want you to investigate the unusual seaside town for them. Armed with a digital camera, nightvision camcorder, EMF meter and dictaphone (for recording EVP), you are tasked with documenting ghostly activity, uncovering the town's long-kept secret and maybe scoring that elusive "lost crown" treasure along the way. Only none of this is particularly difficult.

The most frustrating obstacle you'll encounter in *The Lost Crown* is the inability to move on to the "next day" because you've missed doing something. Like most point-and-click offerings, you must accomplish various goals, such as talking to a certain villager, finding a specific clue or recording some selected ghostly phenomena, before you can continue.

Where the game excels is in its atmospheric visuals and sound design. The mostly black and white graphics, accented with splashes of color, give the proceedings an otherworldly feel, suitably amplified by the eerie sound design — creaking, thumping, non-corporeal whispers and creepy music.

Unfortunately, because it lacks the much-needed complex puzzles, *The Lost Crown* plays more like an interactive movie than a video game. You may want to visit once for the ghost-hunting, but we highly doubt you'll stay.

Monica S. Kuebler



Spectral Scrutiny: (left to right) Dave Tango, Jason Hawes, Grant Wilson, Steve Gonsalves and Kyla Williams review evidence.

to use science and technology to add credibility to their investigations. In fact, Nickell has openly questioned the validity of non-scientists using scientific equipment for purposes which it was never intended.

But Gonsalves trusts his team's methodology, pointing out that at least one alternative, the use of psychics, is much less verifiable.

"For me, most of the problem with ghost shows is that they use the psychics, they use the mediums, and that doesn't make sense, because how can you validate anything they're saying?" wonders Gonsalves. "How can a spirit say, 'My name begins with J,' but it can't say 'I'm John,' if you know what I mean?"

Because they believe so strongly in what they do, retaining credibility continues to be paramount to the TAPS team, especially considering that several similar shows have been alleged to schedule "happenings" or fake supporting details (see sidebar, p. 28). A big part of *Ghost Hunters*, therefore, is scrutinizing the data and weighing the balance of probabilities.

Hawes has joked on several episodes that the advantage of being a plumber and a paranormal investigator is that you can often attribute "activity" to the water pipes.

"We one hundred percent believe that it's not worth fooling ourselves," confirms Gonsalves. "Why do we want to fool ourselves? If we're not sure that it is a ghost, why do we want to sit there and pretend to ourselves that it is?"

Some argue that it makes for better TV when mysterious activity happens onscreen, but both TAPS and the show's producers work hard to present their evidence reliably.

"There have been times when we've found evidence and the producers of the show have decided not to show it," explains Gonsalves. "It's usually to protect TAPS. For instance, there was a piece of evidence where [a table] moved and we wanted to put it on the show so bad, but the producers were like, 'Listen. People watching this are going to think that this is phoney, you know, we can't see the legs of the table to see it somebody was dragging [it]. They're just going to think that there was someone there moving it.' They do things like that to protect the TAPS team's credibility."

Still, they do make many of their findings available online (at scifi.com/ghosthunters), and the video evidence posted there actively encourages viewers to make up their own minds.

"We say, 'We don't know what this is, please help us out!'" notes Gonsalves, who also invites academic researchers to view the unexplained footage and try provide a conclusive explanation for it. "In season one, we had an apparition — a dark figure came up and

back from the camera and it was not a person, because we keep track of everybody [on the team]. It was — we don't know."

Over the past four years, *Ghost Hunters* has followed TAPS as they've investigated libraries, museums and even the Wright-Patterson U.S. Air Force base. While the jury may still be out on the actual cause of the various phenomena they've found, it's the show's focus on verifiable evidence that ensures its continued relevance and popularity. One thing's certain, there's no shortage of purported hauntings to investigate. Now, who ya gonna call? **Z**

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STEVE GONSALVES

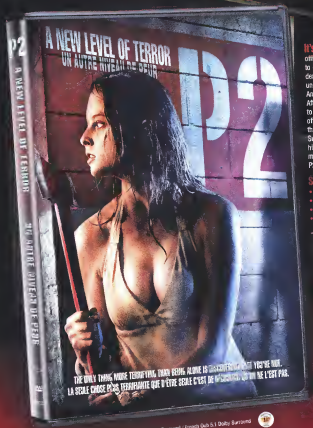
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—JENNIFER CARLOSINI, THE NEW YORK TIMES



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ONCE UPON A TIME, CHURCH-BACKED INQUISITORS, ARMED WITH THE **MALLEUS MALEFICARUM**, SPREAD TERROR THROUGHOUT EUROPE, TORTURING AND KILLING THOSE WHO THEY DEEMED WITCHES. A NEW SCHOLARLY TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK SHEDS LIGHT ON ONE OF HISTORY'S DARKEST PERIODS.

THE WITCH HUNTER'S Bible

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE

The witch hunts that ravaged Western Europe in the 16th century left behind a legacy of paranoia and pain as merciless inquisitors persecuted innocent citizens in a wave of torture and execution like nothing the world had seen before. And it can be blamed on a single book.

Malleus Maleficarum (Hammer of Witches) was a document published in 1486 by two Dominican friars, Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, which extensively detailed the Catholic Church's acknowledgement of the existence of witches and, more importantly, set down a prescribed set of rules for the indictment, judgment and punishment of those accused of the crime of witchcraft.

In 1484, Sprenger and Kramer sought permission from Pope Innocent VIII to prosecute religious deviancy in their native Germany, specifically in the regions of the Rhine Valley. Kramer had already been appointed the Grand Inquisitor of Germany and had little trouble securing the go-ahead for the two of them to begin their work.

The Pope's confirmation of their activities gave their initiation the legitimacy to actively pursue those accused of witchcraft and to do whatever was necessary to convert, condemn or execute the wrongdoers. It also provided for the formation of a group of educated investigators who would have carte blanche to root out any deviancy they came across and prosecute anyone who stood in

their way. It became the most influential witch-hunter manual ever created and paved the way for the horrific witch hunts that would take place for centuries after its publication.

At the time Sprenger and Kramer set to work on the *Malleus* there were only a handful of works available that dealt with witchcraft, and they used these liberally in their writing. (The *Directorio Inquisitorio* written by Nicholas Eymerich in 1376 was a handbook detailing procedures for dealing with heretics, and *Frodoquatus*, written by Johannes Hieron in 1475, advocated moral and spiritual reform and briefly dealt with witchcraft and its effects on Christian society.)

It was the first printed discussion (and a very elaborate one at that) of the comparatively new interpretation of witchcraft as a form of Satanism (also called "dabolism"), which instigated Kramer's (banned name) call for "heresy of witches." That is, that there was a heretical sect that was headed over by Satan himself, whose purpose was to subvert Christianity, said which involved the deliberate infliction of pointless harm through witchcraft," explains University of Alberta History and Classics professor Christopher Mackay, whose extensive new translation of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was recently published by "Cambridge University Press." Naturally, the manipulation of the world through the use of "magic" (however defined) has always existed, but this particular interpretation, which was at the basis of the so-called witch craze of the 16th and 17th

Malleus Maleficarum

EDITED BY THE LAST CHANCE LANCE
TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER MACKAY



centuries, is not attested before the early 15th century, and the *Malleus* played a large role in the early dissemination of the new "theory of witchcraft."

Though the *Malleus* had been published 28 times, by the end of the 16th century it had fallen into relative obscurity and had not been reprinted since 1668. It wasn't until 1928, when Augustus Montague Summers (an English clergyman whose interest in the occult led him to write a plethora of books on witches, vampires and werewolves) translated it into English.

But many scholars believed that Summers's translation was lacking in its scope and accuracy, and that a new, English translation was long overdue.

"Summers is a dilettante and — to some extent — a fraud," says Mackay. "There is a biography from the 1950s written by a friend that (unintentionally) presents a very unflattering picture of the man. He was studying to be an Anglican — I think — minister at the beginning of the 20th century, when he got caught up in some sort of scandal, seemingly involving homosexuality, though the details are hazy. He then became a Catholic, and apparently did some study to become a priest but there is no evidence that he was ever ordained, despite his friend's valiant efforts to argue this away. ... Anyway, he had enough Latin to make an okay job of translating the text, but it isn't very accurate."

In 1998, Cambridge approached Mackay to take on the daunting task of re-translating the *Malleus*.

"I began by transcribing the Latin text from a facsimile of the first edition of 1486," he explains, "and it soon became apparent that a proper edition of the Latin was necessary. I also undertook the laborious task of finding all the sources upon which the original composition was based."

Several years later, Mackay returned with a 2000-page manuscript that would prove to be the only accurate English translation ever made. His two-volume work offers a meticulously edited Latin and English version of the *Malleus*, as well as an extremely informative 185-page introduction and notes.

The tome is divided into three main sections, the first of which exhaustively deals with the existence of witchcraft, stipulating that the Devil does indeed exist as a very real and palpably evil entity and that he requires servants to do his work on the Earth. According to the text, these servants, or witches, tend to be women far more often than men because of their inherent feminine inability to control their carnal lust

for Satan and therefore became excellent vessels for his heresy.

The next section deals with select cases of witchcraft and presents itself as undisputed evidence of the many spells that witches are able to cast and how they use their bodies and feminine charms to torment and seduce even the most devout Christian followers. It is described how witches have the ability to destroy crops and livestock and cause extreme weather conditions such as floods and droughts. One of the examples cited details how an accused witch who was angered at the fact that she had not been invited to a wedding, dug a trench in the ground and filled it with her own urine, which she then stirred with her finger while calling upon Satan, who promptly raised the liquid up into the sky where it was transformed into a storm of hailstones which rained upon the wedding guests. She was found guilty of her "crime" and burned alive at the stake.

It also details eyewitness accounts of witches murdering newborn infants and stealing children, which they would cook in cauldrons to make soups.

In a particularly Freudian example of the root of the witch-hunting craze, there are seven chapters alone concerned with the horrible things that a witch can do to a man's penis. Historically, there are even supposed accounts of witches causing men's penises to disappear, and witches who would collect as many as twenty or 30 penises and hide them in a box or a bird's nest, where the members would report-

edly move around as though they were living animals feeding on oats and corn.

"It sounds vaguely reminiscent of the joke that's taken at face value in the *Malleus*," says Mackay. "A guy pisses off a witch, so she makes his putz disappear. He goes and pleads with her to get it back, and she relents. She tells him to climb a tree and he'll find a lot of penises in a nest. He can take which ever he wants. He gets up there, and pulls out a big one to ask if he can take it. She says, 'No, that one belongs to the parish priest' — ba-dum boom."

The last section of the book deals with the correct way to properly prosecute a person accused of witchcraft. Every part of the trial is meticulously detailed from the gathering of evidence and the selection of witnesses to the formal charging of the accused. This was also the section that dealt with the proper way to punish a person who was found guilty of witchcraft and detailed the type of torture and the method of execution to be used.

Even though it was widely accepted by the Catholic church and the inquisition that torture was not a viable or reliable way of extracting the truth from the accused, it was still commonly employed in many witchcraft investigations.

The *Malleus* justifies its use as long as a prosecution could be corroborated by the accounts of two or three witnesses. If only one witness could be found, then it became permissible to use excessive torture in order to elicit a confession. And in an effort to prove that it was not a confession that had been culled under the





INFERNAL DEVICE: MACHINERY OF TORTURE AND EXECUTION

Erik C. Rühling

The Deformation Company

Head Crusher, Chain Scourge, Iron Maiden. The Fear of Anguish — they might sound like the line-up for a heavy metal festival, but in reality they're some of the most terrifying examples of humanity's penchant for cruelty. In his new book, *Infernal Device*, Erik Rühling has gathered 30 of the most barbarous and terrifying creations that man has ever invented to inflict pain on, or end the life of, his fellow man.

Each item is described in all of its gory detail, from the dreaded interrogation chair, which would pierce anyone unlucky enough to be forced to sit upon its 2000 sharpened metal spikes; the knee splitter, which clamped onto a person's elbows, knees, ankles or wrists and slowly crushed their joints as it was gradually, agonizingly tightened; or the aforementioned Fear of Anguish, a pear-shaped metal device inserted into an anus or vagina, which would then open up as the torturer turned a screw, causing major damage as it expanded.

Accompanying the descriptions are computer-rendered images that, while quite detailed, often look really fake, undermining the sinister nature of the torture implements. Rühling's decision not to at least complement these graphics with historical photographs, woodcuttings or line art is unfortunate.

Still, one of the highlights of this book is the informative and often amusing histories that accompany each of the devices. For instance, Rühling notes how the family of famed French physician Dr. Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, the man whose name graces the guillotine, was upset that the device, which became associated with the bloody French Revolution, was named after him by an adoring public.

Though many of the devices featured within the book are familiar as macabre museum pieces, reproductions in carnival haunted houses or as set dressing in gothic horror flicks, Rühling presents many more obscure ghastly implements, which help spotlight some unpleasant examples of humanity's penchant for creative cruelty.

Last Chance Lence



pain of torture, the accused would be compelled to confess again the next day without any torture being applied to them. Any person who recanted his or her confession would be tortured again until they once again confessed. If that were not enough, torture could also be authorized even after a confession had been obtained in order to attain a list of accomplices.

Many of the accused would admit to a crime they had not committed or implicate innocent friends or acquaintances rather than undergo torture of any type, resulting in many more atrocities.

Mackay says, "Institutors copied over verbatim the injunction from the *Directorium Inquisitorium* that only the traditional method of the strappado was to be used. (This involves tying the person's hands behind their back and hauling them up by a rope attached to a pulley and tied to their hands, so that all the weight of the body hangs from the shoulders.) The torturers are told to be sad — bad sign if they are otherwise — and it was thought to be unseemly to come up with clever new methods."

That didn't stop other methods of torture from being used, however, as the book became more popular. Both ecclesiastical and secular bodies found themselves prosecuting witches for the very first time with little to no idea on how to proceed and turned to the *Malleus* as a guide.

With the political and legal authority of Germany fragmented at best, the desire to seek out and destroy witches was one of the very few doctrinal beliefs that both Catholics and Protestants could agree upon, which made it possible for panic to spread en masse. People began to see the Devil's hand at work all across the land, and witch hunts became increasingly common.

Though most informed sources estimate that the number of people who were executed as

...IF ONE IS WILLING TO
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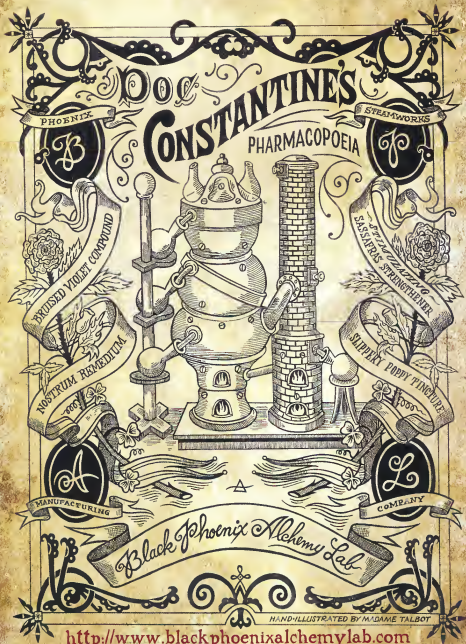
CHRISTOPHER MACKAY

witches ranges from 40,000 to 100,000, just how much misery it caused is impossible to calculate. If the *Malleus* does nothing else, it most certainly provides us with a frightening insight into the medieval mindset of the late 15th century. Religion played a massive role in the everyday life of people who believed that demons walked the earth, angels flew through the sky and questioning the word of God, particularly if you were a woman, was not an option.

"Part of the problem with the *Malleus* from a modern perspective," Mackay expounds, "is that most people view Christianity as a religion of love. Certainly there are a lot of passages in the New Testament to go with that conception, but even there, there is more than enough evidence to support a severe and vengeful interpretation of God's will, and if one is willing to take the Old Testament at face value, then you can wind up with a very stern and unforgiving God. And that's the one presupposed in the *Malleus*."

Five hundred years later, one wonders how *Hammer of Witches* fits into history, and if it offers any relevant lessons. In light of a rash of daycare workers being falsely accused of child abuse in the '80s and '90s, and goth kids being persecuted in the wake of the Columbine massacre, Mackay says yes.

"...[W]hile we may laugh at this and dismiss it as 'benghted medieval ignorance,'" he explains, "we are just as susceptible to such faults today... The only difference between such cases and the witch craze of the past is that it's a lot easier with modern forms of communication for the falsehood of these conceptions to become manifest (and even then it can take years to undo the harm). The *Malleus* is a very clear example of the sorts of logical (and seemingly benign) results that are based in totally false preconceptions. It's a lesson that we should always bear in mind."



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KRIS KUKSI CONSTRUCTS FIENDISH AND INTRICATE LANDSCAPES OUT OF MODEL PARTS, CHILDREN'S TOYS, THE BONES OF ANATOMICAL FIGURES AND OTHER MORBID MISCELLANEA.

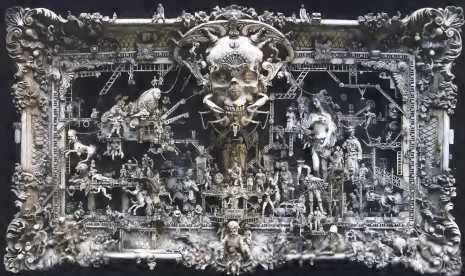
THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

36 RUE MORGUE

If Hieronymus Bosch had been an architect, his creations would likely resemble the obsessively intricate sculptures of American artist Kris Kuksi. Not only are each of Kuksi's pieces carefully steeped in macabre imagery and social commentary, but according to his artist's statement, one of the primary goals of his work is to "expose the fallacies of man."

"Man is a funny creature," explains Kuksi, who also draws and paints professionally but considers himself a "builder" first and foremost. "He tries so hard to escape his animal impulses by creating religion, government and morals. But mankind continually creates a hellish world filled with racism, war and



crime. So, mankind sets itself to fail by its own rules and idealism. If the animal isn't good enough to be human, maybe humans aren't either."

Thematically, the 35-year-old artist's diorama-like sculptures examine and deconstruct the idealism that forever preoccupies mankind. His sculpted scenarios, which can take up to two weeks to construct, but much longer to plan, design and prepare, are fashioned using materials such as model parts, toys and the bones of anatomical models, as well as finely photo-etched brass work. Most of Kukul's pieces allude to the human condition, particularly the innate, lifelong struggle for power and control. As such, his works are full of people (many naked) indulging in various ribald and sexual excesses, religious iconography, death imagery and even cultural icons — Propaganda, Am-Bush Machine, for instance, uses a modified tank, complete with severed skulls, pincher claws and a bifurcated sculpt of George W. Bush's head to make a political statement.

Not surprisingly, Kukul's exploration of human excess and idealism is merely an extension of his ongoing fascination with the "corrupt and demoralized fall of modern-day society." Another sculpture, *The Deadly Sins*, which features animals with human heads, bifurcated torsos and all manner of lasciviousness lorded over by a horned human skull modified to include crab-like appendages extruding from its cheekbones, serves as a pitch-perfect example of this theme at play in the artist's work.



The Fallacies of Man: Original Sin, The Deadly Sins (top) and (opposite) A New Divinity.

I WAS VERY FASCINATED WITH DEAD AND PRESERVED ANIMALS. I THINK IT IS THE STRUCTURE OF SKELETAL REMAINS THAT REALLY INSPIRES ME.

KRIS KUKSI



Beauty in Grotesquery: Propaganda Air-bush Machine, and (below) The Decision

Kuksi, who first developed an interest in creating art at the age of five, has also studied the subject at the post-secondary level. Yet, he is somewhat dismissive of his education, explaining: "I did get two degrees in art here in Kansas but I'd say that it was something I picked up by looking at the work of the old masters, really. A work of art can teach so much to a keen observer."

But it's his childhood, spent growing up in an isolated, stark, rural environment with an alcoholic stepfather, that he credits for both his imagination and introversion, as well with his fascination with the unusual.

"I always had a lean towards grotesque images and ideas," says Kuksi, a long-time fan of Edgar Allan Poe. "I was very fascinated with dead and preserved animals. I think it is the structure of skeletal remains that really inspires me. It is the framework of the body. I can have the same sort of interest in the construction of a building, seeing all the truss work and underlying structures. But in the macabre side of things,

it really is just an aesthetic that I am drawn to."

Quite simply, he sees the grotesque as beautiful and death as inevitable.

"Man in most Western cultures is in denial about his own death," says

Kuksi, whose pieces often function as shrines to our own mortality.

"Though it is a force of nature you can't do anything about, man instead treats death as tragic and accidental. Sorrow and remorse surround the death ideals of Western man, so in defense, he would much rather find a path to immortality! An after-life beyond the grave sure sounds good!"

For a list of Kris Kuksi's upcoming gallery exhibitions, visit kuksi.com.



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This over the top splatter fest is one of the most brutal films ever to come out of the German Underground. Unearthed Films is proud to be the 1st company to release it in the US. D45 KOMABRUTALE DUELL has been banned in Germany in 2007 due to unrelenting violence and government laws that will not allow anyone who tries to be available to the public. This film is heralded as the 1st post-apocalyptic splatter movie. So get your friends together, get lots of beer, get your boarders for a gorehounds delight of excruciations, autopsies, dismemberments and plain old nasty necrotic death, that will leave you begging for more.

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NORWAY'S MOST FAMOUS **black metallers** WANT LISTENERS TO CONSIDER THAT THIS EXISTENCE IS THE REAL HELL AND THE MORE YOU KNOW ABOUT IT, THE WORSE OFF YOU ARE.

The **BLEAK DIMENSIONS** *of*

Dimmu Borgir

BY KEITH CARMAN



Some bands strive to convey an image. Some nurture it inherently. And while many acts embrace the world of horror and haphazardly tie it to their preferred musical genre, there are certain dark souls who define what it is to be a genuinely horrific band.

In the case of black metal, Oslo, Norway's Dimmu Borgir (which includes vocalist Shagrath, guitarists Silenoz and Galder, keyboardist Mustis, bassist ICS Vortex and drummer Tony Laureano) has managed to forge a union between the scene's stark, morbid atmosphere and an almost spiritual twist to horror.

"I need entertainment from the dark side," Silenoz tells *Rue Morgue* just prior to their North American tour, kicking off in Toronto this month. "It's authentic. The dark side is the most positive thing to us because it's the most creative and constructive, a continuation of how we are as beings. We transform ourselves in the art and music we make."

According to Silenoz, the members of Dimmu Borgir (who take their name from a volcanic rock formation in Iceland, roughly translated as "dark cities") aren't content to simply suggest the illusion of evil; rather, they are evil in the core of their being, and prefer to channel mysticism and mental torment over the blood 'n' guts, insert-axe-wielding-maniac-here,

generic barbarism that defines many of their contemporaries.

"Atmosphere is our direct link to horror and we create it by challenging the world through our lyrics," he explains. "As a band we could never believe in something we can't understand. The fear of uncertainty is more attractive than a goofy slaughter-fest. The unknown is alluring but fearful. To me, the word 'occult' is not a negative thing. It means 'things that are unknown and hidden.' That's how we see a lot of this world, especially ourselves."

Dimmu Borgir formed in 1993 and quickly rose to the top of the black metal heap with their debut EP *Inn / Evighetens Merke* ("Into The Darkness of Eternity"). While still embracing traditional elements of the genre—corpse paint, studded leather (by LA's Junker Designs, who will also direct the band's upcoming video), gothic settings—they have been heralded as musical innovators for expanding on the raw drive of influences such as Venom and Celtic Frost with more supernatural imagery/lyrics and experimental elements including symphonic synths. As such, they are credited with elevating black metal beyond the simplistic relation of explicit lyrics and suggestive artwork (looking in Mayhem's direction...), relating cryptic tales on musical dirges such as "Architecture of Genocidal Nature," "Blood Hunger" and "Sinister Awakening."

"Lyrically, that's so natural for us," shrugs Silenoz. "We intend to unsettle people by offering our own opinions on life and religion and asking a lot of questions. It's up to everyone else to think for themselves. Our art is to be a devil's advocate and convey it through an atmospheric sound."

As "devil's advocates," Silenoz notes that Dimmu Borgir's primary intent—all while enshrouded in evil imagery—is to force stagnant minds into action. Refusing to accept that complacency is living, the band presents a bleak alternative in an attempt to spurn their listeners into some sort of elevated intellectual state.

"We want that feeling of almost negative escapism, like you're trapped but you keep searching for answers or a way out," he says. "The only way to get that across is to make people think more. The more you think about your current reality, the more unsettled or potentially fearful you become. Most people don't think about their own death most of the time, but when they do, they start to worry about how or when it will happen and they get freaked out. That's how we perceive life. It's the reality and the beauty of darkness."

Due to a bloated negative misconception of Norwegian black metal via the stigma of a few misguided acts (church burnings and murders

by attention-hungry early scenesters over a decade ago still haunt the genre), Dimmu Borgir is often considered to be little more than yet another collection of Satanists praising the Bad Word of the Dark Lord. And while the band more than dabbles in demonic imagery, Silenoz strives to quash that mentality by removing the religious association to Anton LaVey's Church Of Satan doctrine, which was rooted in the belief that satanic worship was about the self, not some deity.

"It's easy for people to see and hear [the satanic connection in our music] because that is what our image represents, but more informed people understand that there is something a lot deeper that connects us to the dark side," he relates.

"Lyrically, we take a satanic stance in the individual sense of the word. We don't have the need to profess the wonders of Satan [or] Satanism. Then it becomes something organized. [We] don't want to be associated with anything that has an 'ism' at the end of it."

Still, Silenoz declares that not all things Dimmu Borgir are morbid. He emphasizes the need for contrast in order to understand all aspects of life and death, reiterating that the majority of the band's main themes are subtle and sub-contextual.

OUR ART IS TO BE A DEVIL'S ADVOCATE AND CONVEY IT THROUGH AN ATMOSPHERIC SOUND.

Silenoz

"Unveiling the darkness of the world, be it satanic or whatever, is not only about image," he asserts. "There's something deeper behind it. I'm more comfortable with light and dark than just one of them. You need the balance. That's how you develop as a human being."

While many oppose bands like Dimmu Borgir, a strong portion of the metal world embraces them. The band's last album, 2007's *In Sorte Diaboli* (Nuclear Blast USA) has been inundated with praise, receiving multiple awards and reaching #1 on the charts in the band's home country. Not bad for a collection of songs revelling in malevolence and spiritual darkness. Anticipation for a follow-up is reaching a critical point, yet Silenoz admits that the band is still only in the planning stages.

"We are working on lyrical ideas and we'll be getting together soon to work on musical ones," he reveals. "We've always tried to do something different from what you'd normally expect from us. At some point in your career you know what will work and what won't, though. Then you work in those frames, but we're not afraid to test the waters. With this last album, it was more jam-based, the old way of writing songs in your rehearsal space rather than writing with a computer. That helped the new album sound more intense. The songs were shorter. Some people like it, some hate it. That's how it'll always be. Regardless, you'll never get it perfect. That's why you make new albums anyway." ☚



Del James jams with *Rue Morgue* about the personal triumphs and tragedies that inspired his highly sought-after collection of horror stories, *The Language of Fear*.

The DEVIL YOU KNOW

by Joanna Pachovic

When he would have thought the inspiration for the Guns N' Roses' mega-hit videos "Don't Cry," "November Rain" and "Estranged" would be some of a short story in a collection of downright nasty horror tales? But that's exactly how it went down... sort of.

Back in 1988, writer/former rock journalist/four manager/video director/horror aficionado Del James wrote a story called "Without You," about a tragic love and a tormented rock star, for his best friend—a troubled, fledgling musician named Axl Rose—as a peaceable gesture to help him through a difficult relationship. Fast forward a few years and the pair were compiling ideas for a rock 'n' roll movie starring Guns N' Roses, based on elements of the same short story.

"The music videos 'Don't Cry,' 'November Rain' and 'Estranged' were to be a part of that movie," explains James. "Axl gave me a shout out at the end of the 'November Rain' video for which I am forever grateful and suddenly people other than my friends wanted to read my stories."

Realizing he had a commodity lurking in his word processor, James locked-in his accumulated short horror tales (about ten of them), wrote five new ones and collected them as *The Language of Fear*. The book (published in 1995 by Dell/Bantam) quickly sold out and has remained highly collectible ever since, ranking in at number seven of Bookfinder.com's top ten most sought-after used books, right behind Ray Bradbury's *Dark Carnival*. For the last twelve years the author has been pushing for a reissue. His musings paid off, and now a paperback reprint of *The Language of Fear*'s is once again available (again, from Dell Publishing), complete with an introduction by Rose.

For the casual reader or rock 'n' roll fan, the book is akin to a punch in the face. Though "Without You" ends in a blaze of melting skin and unimaginable emotional torment, it is by far the book's tamest tale. The rest of the stories, while still firmly rooted in sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, are horror tales stemming from the grim side of the human experience—gritty, violent and unquestionably dark.

"I've always been drawn to the dark," admits James, a one-time New York City street kid. "It's just who I am. As a kid I grew up on *Creature Feature* and *Chiller*. I read all the comic books of the '70s and, of course, built all of the Axlora models. I slept in the living room of our one-bedroom apartment, so after a few days my folks would be like, 'You're going to have to get rid of that.' So I would take my models outside and either light them on fire or blow them up with fireworks. I mean, even playing with toys took on dark

overtones. It was an execution of sorts, and I wore the black hood."

It seems not much has changed, as James is still performing musical executions—this time, in his stories. Inside *The Language of Fear* a man sells his child for heroin ("A Tale of Two Heroines"), a pervert loses his manhood to an acid bath ("Adult Nature Material") and another, more desperate, wrench opens his wife's throat for a phone sex prostitute ("Date Rape"). There's even an undead biker ("The Immortals"), a mind-fucking TV ("Mindwarp"), a grotesque thing in the woods eating stoned teenagers ("The Nerve"), satanic rituals ("Skin Deep") and all manner of immoral abomination. It's no surprise to learn many of the tales draw from "a filthy well of jarring personal experiences accumulated from a life of generous excess. For James, it's the ultimate devil-you-know scenario."

"There's a little bit of me in just about everything I write," he admits. "The overdoses, the violence, going to jail, waking up in hospitals, crashing motorcycles and crimes committed all helped shape my view of the world. [As a kid] I hung out in dreary apartment basements and got stoned in graveyards and listened to Black Sabbath and snuck into the movie theatres to see all of the latest horror films. My family was the first one on the block to own a top-loader VCR, so I would walk for miles to video stores to rent anything that I had yet to see. I remember renting *Shogun* and getting upset because I thought I'd really just watched a woman die. But not upset enough to ever turn my back on the genre. My hunger for horror was insatiable. Still fucking is."

True to his word, James is putting the finishing touches on his first horror novel, *A Celebration of Pain*, and has even written a "straight-up horror" screenplay based on "The Nerve," both of which he plans to start shopping around soon. Says James: "[*Celebration*] is a very personal story and one that I am quite proud of. Set in New York City, it's a twisted love story with enough sex, drugs and murder to satisfy anyone who digs what I do."





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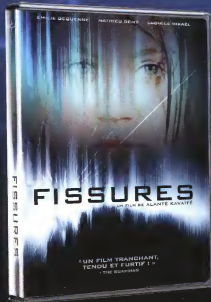
—GARDENING MARGARET



High atop a scenic hillside in Goodhouse stands the lonely Besley's Manor, governed by the ominous Landlord and his gallery of rogues. Always on the lookout for females to carry on the Besley name (willingly or not), the Landlord keeps a watchful eye over all of his land and brutally dispatches those women who dare set foot upon it.

When three improbable heroes stumble, unsuspectingly onto his property, the quiet beauty of the countryside suddenly erupts in a torrent of blood and violence in a menacing hunt and chase for his future bride.

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Nightmare Detective: Much more than a Cravenesque kick at J-horror's exhausted bag of tricks.

TSUKAMOTO'S BAD DREAMS

NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE

Starring Hitomi, Ryuhei Matsuda
and Masanobu Ando
Written and directed by Shinya Tsukamoto
Dimension Extreme

The opening scene of Shinya Tsukamoto's *Nightmare Detective* both signals the director's continuing drift into the mausoleum of Japanese horror while also confirming his status as one of the genre's true visionaries. As a middle-aged Tokyo businessman sits down to a solitary dinner of noodles and beer, the camera shifts to reveal a strange decoration on the wall behind him: a thick lock of long black hair hanging from a simple hook. Before we can fully process Tsukamoto's re-imagining of this ubiquitous symbol of J-horror mayhem, a man dressed only in a monkish robe crawls from underneath the floorboards and calmly explains to the businessman that the hair belongs to his unborn daughter, who was aborted at the beginning of his marriage.

The ensuing scenes of surreal metamorphosis and violence quickly establish *Nightmare Detective* as much more than a witty Cravenesque kick at J-horror's exhausted bag of tricks. The movie's tone is bleak and just gets

bleaker as Tsukamoto (best known for his debut feature *Tetsuo: Iron Man*) employs a fairly conventional plot—a police investigation into series of violent suicides that appear to have been triggered by men known only as “Zero”—to penetrate the slick veneer of downtown Tokyo, revealing a city collapsing under the weight of its own hypocrisy, greed and repressed self-loathing.

The titular “detective” is a disturbed young man (Ryuhei Matsuda) who can enter other people's dreams at will. When he is asked to join the suicide investigation by an unconventional cop, played with surprising conviction by Japanese pop star Hitomi, the film fully immerses viewers in a vast subconscious labyrinth of fear and desire, at the heart of which rages a murderous villain lifted from a David Lynch storyboard.

The real mystery in need of some detective work is why the film is being released under the schlocky Dimension Extreme umbrella, but scalp's off to Weinstein and company for bringing *Nightmare Detective* to North America and including an excellent making-of feature with the package. Hopefully the sequel, now in post-production, will get the star treatment it most likely deserves.

James Grainger

FIRST GORE

RAMBO

Starring Sylvester Stallone, Julie Benz
and Paul Schulze
Directed by Sylvester Stallone
Written by Art Monterastelli
and Sylvester Stallone
Maple

Blood, guts and glory... but mostly blood and guts.

It seems Sly Stallone has been spending some quality time with his son Sage, the gore fan behind Grindhouse Releasing, the label that put out the special edition of *Cannibal Holocaust*. Or maybe the aging star, who's never come closer than *Deathbreath* 2000 to making a horror film, is drawing upon the Italian tradition of gory action films such as *Rico the Mean Machine* (reviewed last issue). Whatever the case, the fourth *Rambo* film spews more meat than any mainstream horror movie in recent memory.

Co-written by Stallone and Art Monterastelli (*Buried Alive*), it sees a still very ripped and very bitter John Rambo working as a snake wrangler in Thailand. He's approached by missionaries wanting to hire him to take them upriver to Burma, where military thugs are slaughtering the locals. After some convincing from a churchie named Sara (Julie Benz: *Buffi, Angel, Dexter*), Rambo ferries them into the heart of the conflict. Expectedly, they're captured, imprisoned and tortured. It's up to *Rambo* and a handful of mercenaries to save them from the horrors of the Burmese prison camp.

Sweet Jesus with a hand grenade, Stallone knows a thing or two about how to up the ante. *Rambo* is a encyclophory of violence that has to be seen to be believed: arrows shot through faces, bodies blown to spaghetti, filleted torsos, heads blown clean off, a prisoner eaten by pigs, babies thrown into burning buildings, a throat literally torn out and army



vehicles painted with brains – all in grisly, grisly detail. Aside from a poorly rendered CGI gutting, the film's 60-plus person effects team puts on a gore clinic.

Rambo has traditionally been mere degrees removed from the slasher villain archetype, as a strong, silent, larger-than-life knife-wielding killer with an innate ability to avoid detection and appear behind his victims like a boogeyman. Abattoir acrobatics aside, that line is thinner than ever, as Stallone cribbs shots right out of the slasher handbook. Whether he's a shadow flitting through the background behind his victims or rising up directly behind them, he's a seemingly supernatural death dealer. He just doesn't do it while wearing a mask (well... maybe a little Botox).

And while *Rambo* is a giddily entertaining gore show, it's also bittersweet, as it gets away with the kind of graphic violence most horror movies get censored like crazy for. Ah, well, I guess when you're Stallone, movie-killin' is as easy as breathin'.

Dave Alexander

NO VISION

THE EYE

Starring Jessica Alba, Alessandro Nivola

and Parker Posey

Directed by David Moreau and Xavier Palud

Written by Sebastian Gutierrez

Lionsgate

Though diluted over time by too many similar films, the Pang brothers' 2002 spookfest *The Eye* remains one of the more effective entries in the Asian horror boom. Any excitement for its US remake died, however, when it was announced the lead role would be given to Jessica Alba, an actress known for her beauty and teen audience appeal but definitely not her acting prowess. By the time it was revealed that David Moreau and Xavier Palud (the French duo behind *Them*) were having parts of their film re-shot by Patrick Lussier (*Dracula 2000*), the vultures were already circling.

As it turns out, this American redoing isn't quite as awful as one might expect, but simply a bland, by-the-numbers retelling of the original, with obvious jump scares in place of atmosphere and style.

Sticking closely to the original's script, Alba plays Sydney, a blind violinist who regains her sight after cornea implant surgery. Naturally, her vision is blurry and unfocused at first, but things get spooky when she starts seeing strange visions of the dead and their CGI otherworldly escorts. The ghostly visions drive Sydney to



Rambo: Stallone takes the action film to a gory new level.

hunt down her donor, leading her and a bumpy doctor to Mexico to resolve the mystery once and for all. The action leads to a message delivered by the dead in the most complicated way possible, perhaps anticipating that Alba's target audience wouldn't pick up on the nuances of the original, writer Sebastian Gutierrez (*Gothika*) annoyingly summarizes the plot in the dialogue. At one point Sydney asks her doctor, "I am seeing, what, dead people?" Then, in the film's climax (again, an almost exact replication of the original's memorable traffic jam scene) Sydney provides a concise summary of her doctor's ghostly message, just in case you missed it.

For what it's worth, *The Eye* doesn't reach the depths of stupidity as, say, *Pulse* (a 2006 remake of the classic *Kairo*), and it does deliver a few jolts. But where the original *Eye* offers a tense mystery with some stylish scares, this is one transplant that deserves to be rejected.

Aaron Von Lupton

"EH"-HORROR

THEY WAIT

Starring Jaime King, Pei-pei Cheng

and Hogan Day

Directed by Ernie Barbarash

Written by Trevor Marlowart, Carl Bessau

and Doug Taylor

TVA Films

Regular *Rue Morgue* readers know that these days, discovering an entertaining J-horror-style ghost film is akin to finding a wooden needle in a burning haystack. *They Wait* is a J-horror-style film that stars an ex-model, was executive produced by Uwe Boll and was made in Canada. Talk about low expectations!

But that aside, it's entertaining. The ex-model in question, Jaime King (*Sin City*), plays Sarah, a mother living in Singapore with her Chinese husband Jason (Terry

Chen) and their young son Sammy (Regan Oey). When Jason's uncle dies, he and his family return home to Vancouver (although it's only ever identified as the "Pacific Northwest") for the funeral. The sad event occurs during Hungry Ghost Month, a time when people attempt to appease the dead with offerings of fruit and burned money.

Our point of reference begins with Sammy. He believes in ghosts and sees several, not all of whom are benign. His mother shares Sammy's ability to see the dead, including a beautiful young Chinese girl with dyed black forearms and a nasty head wound. Sammy soon takes ill, but Western doctors can't diagnose him. Sarah, aided by a benevolent old Chinese pharmacist (*Rush Hour 3*'s Henry O), discovers that the long-haired ghost girl who holds her son's life in her blackened hands is actually working towards a noble purpose – one that involves vengeance against members of her husband's family for old wrongs. Soon enough, family secrets are revealed and Sarah must trust in forces she does not understand in order to save her son.

They Wait does a good job of invoking the conflict between Eastern and Western values without overplaying it. (For example, Sarah, a white Westerner, is not trusted by her husband's Aunt Mei, played by Pei-Pei Cheng, and has trouble believing in forces beyond her cultural experience.) Director Ernie Barbarash (*Cube Zero*) meanwhile heightens the tension with casually deployed jump scares and well-done CGI, while the smart script neatly shifts focus from innocent Sammy to flustered Sarah. The result is a horror film that unexpectedly defies its pedigree. Ladies and gentlemen, we found the needle.

Sean Plummer





LAMBERT'S LAMENT

THE ATTIC

Starring Elisabeth Moss, Tom Malloy and John Savage
Directed by Mary Lambert
Written by Tom Malloy
Allumination Filmworks

It's hard to believe director Mary Lambert (*Pet Sematary*) was once given the reins of major motion picture fare after watching the improbable and unoriginal *The Attic*.

A month after Emma Callan (Elisabeth Moss) and her family move into their dream home, she begins to see an apparition in her own likeness roaming about the house and — you guessed it — the attic. Of course, no one in her family, including her mentally challenged brother Frankie (writer Tom Malloy), believes her and thus, she enters your run-of-the-mill downward spiral. Unable to cut or leave the house for more than a month, her obsession devours her. Could this possibly be a twin sister her parents never told her about? Did her emotionally abusive father kill her doppelgänger at birth?

Have no fear, a romantic subplot/love interest is here! Once the police become involved, enter John Trevor (Jason Lewis), a chiselled, human Ken doll of a detective who buys Emma's story and corroborates the suspicion that her twin sister died twelve days after being born with birth defects. When mysterious Wiccan symbols then appear on the attic walls, the duo discerns that Emma's parents are using black magic to bring sis back from the grave. But nothing is certain, Emma is losing her mind and the spirit's haunting only seems to be intensifying.

Can Emma vanquish the demon before she goes batshit? How can she prove to everyone this girl exists? Will poor Frankie survive his steady stream of Cosy Christmas sweaters, let alone all 85 minutes of this dull movie?

Well, the answer to all of those tough questions is, unfortunately, no. The acting and directing feel forced, it's not scary in the slightest and even the scenes that are meant to be jarring have little effect, as they've all been done before in better films. The final act holds

Automatons: Angus Scrimm as the polemic-spouting "Scientist"

SCRIMM-BOTS

AUTOMATONS

Starring Christine Spencer, Angus Scrimm and Brenda Cooney
Written and directed by James Felix McKenney
Glass Eye Pix

Throughout the years, science fiction has not only been a highly entertaining genre, it has also served as an allegorical medium to comment on problems facing society, and done it in a way that's informed, even educational, without being obvious or controversial. Like a cross between an early episode of *Doctor Who* and *The Outer Limits*, *Automatons* strives for something more than mere entertainment, as well.

Filmed in black and white super-8mm "Robo-Monstervision," it revels in a retro-'50s look as it follows a nameless girl who survived a horrific war and lives in a claustrophobic underground bunker, where she repairs robots that have been damaged in battle. The machines themselves look like they shuffled off the set of some low-tech sci-fi films of yore — perhaps *Radar Men from the Moon* (1952) or *Target Earth* (1954), which featured

robots made out of cardboard, garbage cans and metal tubing.

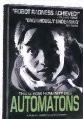
The storyline plays out through the video diary of a man called The Scientist (*Phantasm*'s Angus Scrimm), which the girl plays as she works. Although he appears only as a blurred, grainy image on a computer video screen, his commentary cobbles together bits and pieces of the past to help the viewer figure out what led to the girl's predicament. His political rhetoric and staunch patriotism fades as he gradually realizes that his government has misled him into fighting an insane, unjust war. It culminates in a final gory

battle between man and machine, featuring some great dismemberments and circular saw eviscerations.

Although *Automatons* has a campy, kitschy feel to it, hidden beneath its minimalist sets, clunky robots, laughable miniatures and modest amounts of dialogue are very strong statements about the uselessness of war and the devastating effects of nationalistic xenophobia.

Automatons is bound for cult status and should be dug up in ten years and viewed again — that is, if humanity is still around.

Last Chance Lance



some redemptive qualities in a twist that rings of Kubrick, but really, only the unnering piano sonata score is consistent in furnishing this uninteresting work with any soul.

Trevor Tumlinski

YOKELSPLATATION

STORM WARNING

Starring Nadia Fardis, Robert Taylor and John Brumpton
Directed by Jamie Blanks
Written by Everett De Roche
Dimension Extreme

With the rash of rural survivalist films of the last few years, it's amazing that anyone dares to leave the city to sample the simpler pleasures of the countryside anymore. If we believe what we see in the movies, tourists in search of unspoiled natural vistas are more likely to find themselves the unwilling victims of prolonged psychodramas involving rape, torture and humiliation, all designed by the vicious locals to reveal the uselessness of their sissy-fied city cousins.

Storm Warning, from Australia's Jamie Blanks (*Urban Legend*), is the latest film to pit feral country folk against late-sipping outsiders. The city slickers here are a well-heeled couple from Melbourne who rent a boat for a little fishing and sight-seeing, then find themselves stranded by a storm in an isolated maze of mangrove swamps. Hubby Rob, a wound-up prosecuting attorney, decides that he and his French wife Pia would be better off looking for help than waiting for rescue, and his

plan seems like a good one when they find an old farmhouse nearby. It's not so good when he discovers a thriving grow-op in an outbuilding.

The somewhat predictable sex-up scenes are handled well, with dialogue and characterizations far superior to the genre's usual pre-carnage bantering. Once

the family of farmers arrives home to discover that unwanted guests have stumbled upon their cash crop, any attempts at originality and subtlety are tossed on the compost heap, though. The farmers are all bad teeth, bad liquor and corny tag lines as they set about terrorizing their captives for no good reason. The gormless yuppie, inexplicably left together in a barely guarded barn while the farmers catch up on the latest girl-and-a-horse porn flick in the living room, suddenly reveals themselves as masters of Rambo-like booby-trapping, setting up the obligatory gore revenge sequences. None of which make the long drive to the country worth it.

James Grainger



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED THIS ISSUE: LANCE TAKES A STAB AT SLASHERS

YOU MAY NOW KISS THE CORPSE

WEDDING SLASHERS

The Institution

I usually have a box of Kleenex at the ready whenever I watch a movie with a "Jenna" in it, but this time it was in anticipation of crying. This Jenna, played by Jessica Kinney, is cursed: every guy she falls for ends up dying a horrible death at the hands of her twisted, incestuous family members. So, she runs away from home to get married, but her kinkfolk find her and decimate the entire wedding party. *Wedding Slashers* is a solid film with clever, funny dialogue, good gore gags and an ultra-cool cameo by Richard Lynch, who has starred in everything from *The Ninth Configuration* to *Puppetmaster 3*. As Jenna's father, he proves the old adage 'bout the family that slays together....

Body Count: 23

Best Slash: A priest's eye-and-gut pluck.



WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

DREAM SLASHERS

Westlake Entertainment

Okay folks, I've never done this before, so understand, I'm serious: do not watch this movie! Do not rent, borrow or download it. This shitty, disjointed and abysmally boring flick follows two couples who join their mutual friend at his hotel in Medoos and end up being hunted down by a soul-sucking demon. One guy spends half the movie prancing around in a leather thong and ball gag, another is tortured with electrified nipple clamps and a huge dildo, and the "star" talent (Irwin Keyes: who played the retarded murder ride attendant in *House of 1000 Corpses*) spends his screen time crying, yelping or just looking incredibly lost. Yet, it's a total snoozer. Seriously, *Dream Slashers* is a must-miss if ever there was one. And coming from me, that's sayin' something!

Body Count: 14

Best Slash: Sorry, all the deaths are lame.



STICKIN' IT TO THE STRAW MAN

SLASH

First Look

From *Dark Harvest* to *The Wizard of Oz*, scarecrows have always gotten under my skin—in a good way. Naturally, I was interested when I came across this rare South African entry in the killer scarecrow genre. Mac, lead singer of a rock band, is called home to attend a funeral and decides to take the entire group along so they can hunker down at the family farm. Here, they're hunted by a killer scarecrow—simple. If one expects anything from slasher films, it's blood and boobs, yet *Slash* skimps on both, with formulaic, off-screen deaths and not a single nude scene. Luckily, the scarecrow is pretty creepy and actor Steve Ballback (Ed Gelfi), who plays Mac's father, saves the flick with some great redneck acting. Yee-haw!

Body Count: 14

Best Slash: Human trapped via threshor.



Last Chance Lance

THE ASYLUM STRIKES AGAIN WITH THREE QUICKIE CREATURE FEATURES HIDING ON THE TAILS OF RECENT HORROR BLOCKBUSTERS.

SEND IN THE CLONIES

BY LAST CHANCE LANCE

I AM OMEGA

Starring Mark Dacascos, Geoff Meed
and Jennifer Lee Wiggins
Directed by Griff Furst
Written by Geoff Meed

ALIEN VS. HUNTER

Starring William Katt and Dedee Pfeiffer
Directed by Scott Harper and Randy Mulkey
Written by David Michael Latt

MONSTER

Starring Sarah Liewing, Erin Sullivan
and Yoshi Ando
Directed by Eric Forsberg
Written by Eric Forsberg and David Michael Latt

Okay, we get it — this is obviously a mockbuster based on the 1964 classic *The Last Man on Earth*. 1971's *The Omega Man* and the recent *I Am Legend*. Problem is, where these films offered solid lead actors (Vincent Price, Charlton Heston and Will Smith, respectively), the best that *The Asylum* could muster for *I Am Omega* was the guy who starred in *Kickboxer 5* and played Eric Draven in *The Crow* TV series, Mark Dacascos.

Dacascos plays Renchard, who's supposed to be the last human on Earth after a virus has killed everyone else off or turned them into blood-thirsty zombies (sound familiar?). Though the movie starts out competently enough with Renchard holed up in a cabin fighting off zombies, it quickly becomes acutely boring as he meanders around the countryside looking for supplies, planting bombs and generally being introspective. At least until a couple of guys show up to enlist his help in rescuing a girl trapped in the city, meaning that the population of the Earth has just quadrupled. From there, it suddenly morphs into a martial arts spectacle featuring far too much kung fu and not enough zombie goo.

I just wish they had gone with my idea for the title: *The Legend of the Last Omega Man on Earth*.

How mad does it make you when you buy a movie based solely on its cover art, only to find out that the images on the cover never appear in the movie?

The barely watchable fiasco is guilty of that as it deals with a group of people caught in the middle of a battle between two aliens (not the ones pictured on the cover) that have crashed on Earth. What's supposed to make a film like this worthwhile are the special effects. We want to see the alien and predator — er, hunter — fighting it out with futuristic weapons and spewing toxic goop on each other. Unfortunately, the fight scenes are inept at best, the alien is an unconvincing CGI spider-thing and the hunter's getup looks like a cross between a scuba diver's wetsuit and a Tin Man Halloween costume.

As appalling as that sounds, the scariest thing about *Alien vs. Hunter* is how horribly lead actor William Katt has aged since starring in *House* and *The Greatest American Hero*. He's barely recognizable as a scenery chewing, washed-up reporter trying to cover the alien battle.

Even if you're a true movie masochist, the completely unbelievable twist at the end of the film may very well turn you off of ever watching an *Asylum* title again.

A giant monster flattens Tokyo... again, but this time it's not Godzilla, Gamera or Rodan. If you haven't guessed it already, this isn't *The Asylum's* take on the Charles Theron movie of the same name, either — it's a rip on *Cloverfield*.

Presented as footage rescued from a disaster that devastated Tokyo, it follows two sisters who have travelled to Japan to film a documentary on global warming get caught up in an attack by a gigantic Lovecraftian monster.

As in *Cloverfield*, the action is filmed on a hand-held video camera that takes the pulse-inducing motion sickness of ultra-shaky-cam to a new high. But what raises this film above most other *Asylum* fare is that it's competently acted by company staples Sarah Liewing (666: *The Child*, *The Hitchhiker*) and Erin Sullivan (*Transmorphers*), who convincingly convey a sense of panic and terror as they scramble to reach what they hope will be the safety of the U.S. Embassy.

Whereas most *Asylum* creature features with any CGI suffer greatly from laughable graphics, this time less is more — in the form of a few slimy tentacles that appear believably. Out of the three new *Asylum* flicks, this one is definitely the pick of the litter. But just remember: *iller* can also mean trashy. **B-**



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REISSUES



THE LIVING DEAD AT MANCHESTER MORGUE: A flesh zombie rises from the slab.

THIS SLEEPING CORPSE WON'T LIE

THE LIVING DEAD AT MANCHESTER MORGUE (1974)

Starring Ray Lovelock, Christine Galbo and Arthur Kennedy
Directed by Jorge Grau
Written by Sandro Continenza and Marcello Coscia
Blue Underground

Horror fans know the double-dip – that oftentimes nefarious practice whereby our favourite flicks are unleashed on DVD in multiple versions. But which do we choose? "This one has been digitally scrubbed." "This one has multiple making-of featurettes." "This one comes with an action figure." You know the drill.

So Blue Underground's "2-Disc Special Edition" of Spanish director Jorge Grau's *The Living Dead at Man-*



chester *Morgue* must be greeted with trepidation. After all, Anchor Bay released a perfectly serviceable version back in 2000 under one of its other various titles, *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*. Blue Underground then re-released it (under the same title) last year. And now BU has unleashed the aforementioned special edition under the *Morgue* moniker, outfitted this time with three admittedly well-done featurettes.

For those unfamiliar with it, *Morgue* (a.k.a. *Corpses and Don't Open the Window*) is a stylish and creepy film about reluctant travelling companions George and Edna (Ray Lovelock and Christine Galbo) whose quiet weekend in the English countryside is disrupted by lumbering corpses awakened by the "ultrasonic radiation" emitted by a local agricultural machine. It's a tense, well-made picture rife with enough glee and genuine

characterization to please gorehounds and ordinary moviegoers alike.

But is it worth trading up? The picture and sound have been remastered "in High Definition from the original camera negative." Indeed, cinematographer Francisco Sempere's work contrasting the ugly Manchester locations with the green hills of Derbyshire is crisp and clean. Likewise, Giuliano Sorgini's atonal score, which mimics the sounds of the film's undead antagonists, is brought to life with inhuman clarity.

Fans will be most interested, though, in the three new supplements. *Back to the Morgue* is an informative 45-minute retrospective tour of the film's English shooting locations hosted by Grau and journalist Gian Luca Castoldi, while *Zombie Fighter* is a perfectly adequate career-encompassing interview with star Lovelock. *Zombie Maker*, meanwhile, is an amusing and honest interview with makeup effects master Giannetto De Rossi (*Zombie, Dune, Howie Tension*) who goes into gory detail about the film's famous breast-ripping gag and the rest of his storied career. Fans who own either previous version may want to rent this, while newcomers won't rue their decision to purchase this *Morgue*.

Sean Plummer

PSYCHO CIRCUS

BARN OF THE NAKED DEAD (1974)

Starring Andrew Pine, Manuella Thress and Sherry Alberoni
Directed by Alan Rudolph
Written by Alan Rudolph and Roman Valenti
Legend House

Back in *RM#72*, I marvelled over Stephen Thrower's book *Nightmare USA*, both because it was a great book and also because it weighed eight freakin' pounds. I also marvelled (inwardly this time) that a good four ounces of it were dedicated to a film I'd never heard of but, from that moment on became determined to see. That film was *Barn of the Naked Dead*.

It's tempting to describe *Barn* – directed by Robert Altman protégé Alan Rudolph – as being equal parts *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Maniac*, *Mother's Day* and *Motel Hell*, except that it predates all of them and isn't quite as entertaining as any of them. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't see it, provided that your appetite for pure cheese is healthy.



TV- and B-movie veteran Andrew Prine (*Grizzly*, *Centerfold Girls*) is Andre, a desert-welling nut job who kidnaps three Vegas-bound showgirls and chains them up in his barn along with some other hapless women he's pressed into service as "circus animals." (Keep that in mind the next time you hear Jerry Lee Lewis sing, "Come on over, baby/We got chicken in the barn/Whose barn?/What barn?/My barn.") The "circus" element is one of many plot points that never quite get developed, with scenery-munching Prine occasionally donning a ringmaster outfit and forcing the women to walk in circles while he cracks a whip overhead.

And then there's Andre's homicidal, nuclear waste-mutated father, who lurks nearby in the desert, waiting to pounce on unwary travellers (shades of the elusive "Queenie" in *Mother's Day*). Exactly how Andre has been able to subdue all these women and keep them captive for months (apparently without any weapons) is left entirely to the audience's imagination. The violence (floggings and several murders) and would-be degradation of the women might actually have been frightening and even offensive if any of it were even halfway convincing, but the action sequences are simply laughable.

So why watch it? Well, there's Prine, a charismatic actor who flings himself into the role like Iggy Pop throws himself into a crowd. There's the unmistakable, authentic aroma of grindhouse sleaze that no one – Tarantino included – has been able to duplicate in the present day. And there's Johnny Legend's *Glove Beat*, an hour-long featurette, in which dear old Johnny shoots the shit with Prine, John Landis, Fred Olen Ray, Brian Yuzna and Ray Dennis Steckler. And there's being able to say you've seen *Barn of the Naked Dead*. I can Can you?

John W. Bowen

SHORT, SWEET AND SLEAZY

42ND STREET FOREVER VOL. 3: EXPLOITATION EXPLOSION Synapse

For those who think that all the weirdest, most fascinating corners of cult cinema have been long since exhausted, 42nd Street



42nd Street Forever Vol. 3: *Blood Beach* is one of many exploitation flicks in Synapse's trailer compilation

Forever Vol. 3: *Exploitation Explosion* is here to prove you wrong with more than 40 coming attractions of rare and obscure trash treasures. Although this edition of Synapse's top-notch trailer compilation series is a bit shorter than previous entries, it still may be the best 42nd Street Forever yet.

Part of the appeal of the 42nd Street Forever releases is their genre-hopping goodness, and this volume is no exception, encompassing everything from women-in-prison exploiters and chop-socky imports to sleazy skin flicks and yee-haw truckin' epics. But horror fiends should be especially pleased to find an outstanding lineup of rare and unseen terror trailers this time around, with only a few readily available on RI DVD. Just for starters, you get Joe Don Baker hauling rabid dogs in *The Pack*, Antonio Margherita ripping off Joe Dante with *Killer Fish* (featuring Lee Majors!), the sand, surf and mayhem of *Blood Beach* and even the Saul Bass-directed killer ant film *Phase IV* – a trailer that is far better than the disappointing film it promotes.

It's also fun to speculate about how well some of these ads work, including several

highly misleading spots – the trailer for the Milton Subotsky-produced killer cat movie *The Uncanny* cagily omits the fact that it's an anthology of several stories, while *The House by the Lake* (a.k.a. *Death Weekend*) is dressed up like a demonic possession film when it's actually a *Straw Dogs*-style revenge thriller.

Non-horror highlights include the weird Lee Van Cleef/Lieh Lo kung-fu spaghetti western *The Stranger and the Gunfighter*, the flatulence-based laughs of *King & 4400* *Frat* and Franco Nero as a master assassin in *Enter the Ninja*.

But the most interesting aspect of 42nd Street Forever Vol. 3 is the addition of a commentary with Fangoria's Michael Gingold, sleaze expert Chris Poggiah and DVD Maniacs/AVManiacs web editor Edwin Samuelson, who make this more than just a disc to throw on in the background of your next party. Despite the short timeframe of each clip, the participants offer up quick opinions and oddball trivia for a laidback, enjoyable track that will make you wish most of these films really were playing at a theatre near you.

Paul Corupe



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RUE MORQUE PEELS OFF THE BLACK GLOVES TO GET A HANDLE ON A PAIR OF UNUSUALLY THOUGHTFUL GIALLOS BY POLITICAL FILMMAKER ALDO LADO.

THE POLITICS OF GIALLI

BY JASON PICHONSKY

Blu Underground's reissue of Anchor Bay's *The Giallo Collection* gives us the perfect opportunity to revisit the early days of Italian filmmaker Aldo Lado's career. Wait—"Who's Lado?" you ask. Well...

Aldo Lado got his start as a director in 1971, in the heyday of Italian genre cinema, and the "decade of the giallo." That he began his career in the giallo genre is no surprise then, yet his films are not typical of the genre, as they're often imbued with social and political commentary. His early surroundings were likely a key influence; he was born in Fiume, Italy, a border town under fascist rule, which after WWII was renamed Rijeka and rejoined Croatia. While he spent his adolescence in Venice, stories and memories of the era's political strife must have shaped him.

Lado's first film, *Short Night of Glass Dolls*—which he also wrote—plays more like a political thriller than a giallo. It opens with an enticing premise: reporter Gregory Moore (Jean Sorel) lies on a mortuary slab, still very conscious and aware. Moore must piece together the fragments of his fading memory in order to solve his own murder. He begins by going over the disappearance of his girlfriend (Barbara Bach), which leads him down a path of conspiracy. The film, which unfolds in flashbacks, also co-stars Ingrid Thulin as "an old flame rekindled," as well as Mario Adorf (Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*) as a key player in the dirty dealings.

Lado's inspiration was a newspaper article about an Italian judge who was shuffled away to a remote corner of Italy after speaking out against the establishment—a man turned by those in power, which Moore quite literally is. The metaphor works, and gives the film an immediate hook.

Although *Glass Dolls* is beautifully shot (making the most of its Prague setting) and confidently directed, it plays more art house than exploitation and lacks the typical giallo stylized kills. For giallo fans, this is its obvious downfall; there are no elaborate murders to maintain audience interest when the plot gets convoluted. In fact, most of the kills occur off-screen, slowing the film down—at least until the surreal orgy and operating theatre climax. Ultimately, we're left with a very

novel and interesting thriller, but one that leaves a genre fan wanting.

Before becoming a director in his own right, Lado worked with legendary Italian filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci, so it's no surprise that an art house sensibility runs through much of his work. That said, Lado's next film, 1972's *Who Saw Her Die?*, sticks much closer to the giallo formula. This may be the result of writing assistance from Massimo D'Avack and Franco Barilli, who co-wrote *The Man From Deep River*, as well as Ruediger Von Spiles, who contributed to the script for *Glass Dolls*.

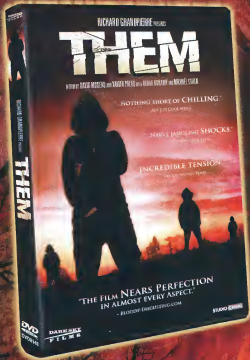
The film stars George Lazenby (best known as the one-off James Bond from *Dr. Her Majesty's Secret Service*) as Franco, an artist living in Venice. His world is shattered when his daughter Roberta (Nicoletta Elmi, *Deep Red*) disappears, only to be found floating lifeless in the canals. Unsatisfied with the police investigation, he takes it upon himself to find her killer, with help from his estranged wife, played by Anita Sbringer. Hell, a gaunt, post-Bond Lazenby with a '70s slashi, losing back his long locks of hair is worth the price of admission alone.

Sticking closely to the template, *Who Saw Her Die?* delivers a number of stylish kills, a roaming camera from the killer's point of view and several red herrings. But Lado also understands the importance of building an emotional connection between his characters and the audience, so he spends a third of the story setting up the relationship between father and daughter before she's murdered. Even though the opening scene of a different child getting killed lets us know Franco's daughter is marked, her death is still a shock. The use of a children's choir in the score (by the legendary Ennio Morricone), reminiscent of Goblin's music for *Suspense*, adds further emotional weight.

The reissues of *Short Night of Glass Dolls* and *Who Saw Her Die?* include an Aldo Lado filmography, theatrical trailer and short but informative interview with the director. Be warned, though, they're direct copies of the previous Anchor Bay releases. **B**



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CINÉMARQUEE

THE LOST COUSIN
OF CALIGARI

THE HANDS OF ORLAC (1924)

Starring Conrad Veidt, Alexandra Sorina
and Hans Hottel

Directed by Robert Wiene

Written by Louis Nizer and Maurice Renard
Kino

Four years after directing Conrad Veidt in the German expressionist classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene reunited with his creepy, dynamic star for *The Hands of Orlac*, a dark, Freudian thriller that again sought to externalize the mysterious inner workings of the mind. Based on the novel *Les mains d'Orlac* by Maurice Renard, the film's exploration of madness and despair introduced the idea of killer body transplants to the screen, and transformed this fantastic plot into one of horror cinema's most indelible and prolific mythologies.

In the movie Veidt plays Paul Orlac, a celebrated pianist whose hands are severed in a horrific train accident. Rushing to her husband's side, Orlac's wife Ivana (Alexandra Sorina) arranges an appointment with Dr. Serral (Hans Hottel), who attempts to salvage the musician's career by grafting the hands of a dead man to his wrists. While recuperating, Orlac learns the donor was a knife-wielding murderer recently executed for his crimes, and is subsequently plagued by vivid nightmares. His fear grows when his clumsy new fingers refuse to tickle the ivories, instead preferring to act out involuntary murderous actions. Driven by mounting financial pressures and the watchful eye of a mysterious stranger, Orlac visits his father and finds he has been stabbed to death. Orlac's "new" fingerprints are all over the knife.

Although *The Hands of Orlac* shares many plot aspects with *Caligari* – science gone mad, psychological obsession and mental anguish – this film is a much more restrained, methodically paced exercise in



The Hands of Orlac: Conrad Veidt and Alexandra Sorina in a rarely seen silent classic

terror that forgoes distorted cubism for a subdued atmosphere. It even uses real-life terror as a jumping-off point. The aftermath of the train derailment that causes Orlac to lose his hands is one of the centrepieces of the film; this grim scene clearly references the devastation and death of World War I as distraught rescue crews search for bodies under twisted metal and machinery, carrying the dead and wounded away on makeshift stretchers.

Playing almost entirely with stark contrasts of darkness and light, *The Hands of Orlac* then slowly merges dreams with reality until Orlac physically inhabits the world within his mind, full of dark thoughts and hidden anxieties. Wiene creates claustrophobia and tension not with off-kilter cinematography and crooked angles, but with tight close-ups, to suggest increasing emotional instability. Much as he did with Cesare the Sombambulist *Caligari*, Veidt mirrors his character's descent into frantic insanity by distorting and twisting his body.

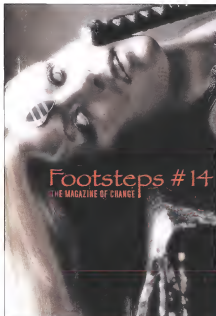
Though the film has thematic parallels to both *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Hands of Orlac* avoids the well-travelled monster movie territory by putting a distinctly relatable human face on

the tragic story. Orlac struggles with a body that has seemingly rebelled, fragmenting his identity – the pianist's uncontrollable limbs deeply threaten his sense of self, making him question his transformation from a world-class musician into a common killer. This timeless theme has been reinvented and reworked many times since, from direct remakes such as *Mad Love* and a 1960s British update with Christopher Lee, to less specific interpretations in the Mexican schlocker *The Witch's Mirror* and Oliver Stone's *The Hand*. More recently, as transplants went from the realm of speculative science fiction to medical reality, *Evil Dead II*, *Body Parts* and the body horror of David Cronenberg have all demonstrated that even as technology progresses, our notions of the body's relationship to our identity still lags.

While *Nosferatu* and *Caligari* have been in constant circulation since the early days of VHS, *The Hands of Orlac* has, until now, never received a legitimate release in North America, despite its undeniable importance both as an early German silent film and a pioneering tale of terror. Making its DVD debut from Kino, *The Hands of Orlac* is available as a standalone release, as well as part of a new German Expressionism Collection with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Secrets of a Soul* and *Warning Shadows*.

Paul Corupe





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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

SPECK AND SPECULATION by John W. Bowen

Some infamous murderers enter the collective consciousness forever, whereas others... well, sic transit gloria, I guess (and no, that's not Latin for "Sally Struthers vomits on subway"). Take Richard Speck, for instance, the most notorious nut-job of the pre-Manion 1960s. Speck remained one of the Western world's top boogymen right up until the mid-'80s, admittedly less iconic than Charlie and family but nonetheless a figure of near-mythic infamy before being overshadowed by the zany antics of Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy and Richard Ramirez.

Despite his lengthy record of petty crime and domestic violence, no one could have predicted the carnage Speck would wreak on the sweltering night of July 13, 1966, torturing, raping and murdering eight student nurses in their Chicago residence. He was arrested several days later and, in relatively short order, tried, convicted and sentenced to death, later commuted to life without parole. So far, three feature films have been based on the Speck case; two, not surprisingly, amid the recent onslaught of low-budget fact-based serial killer films, predicated by an obscure effort (the best, if also the strangest) from 1976.

Although rife with minor flaws, Mark Felfer's 2007 film *Chicago Massacre* is powerfully realized and fuelled by a volatile but never over-the-top performance by Colin Nemecek (killer dark Harold in *The Stand*). It's also the first of these three films to give Speck a substantial back story. Genre mainstays Andrew Davoff and Tony Todd are solid and sympathetic as detectives, despite being saddled with some atrocious lines (There oughta be an Oscar for actors who can maintain their dignity while gamely soldiering through CSI-worthy butt-clenchers such as, "I think this guy's a scumbag cut from the same cloth as Jack the Ripper.") *Chicago Massacre*'s soundtrack also merits mention for its handful of original hits, a curiosity for such a low-budget film. We're treat-



ed to flashback footage of Speck brutalizing his wife to the strains of Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man," while other familiar ditties by Patsy Cline, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, The Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix lend the film period authenticity.

Speck (RMA30), from 2002, appears to have been an even lower-budgeted effort — and occasionally suffers for it — but director Keith Walley ratchets up the tension admirably and milks a palpable sense of claustrophobia from his film's confined setting, even when his addiction to low angles becomes tiresome. Like *Nemec* in *Chicago Massacre*, Doug Cole brings true ferocity to the title role without overacting, and the script sticks closely to the facts of the case. Let's just be thankful Walley got this project instead of Chris Fisher (*Nightmaker*, *The Hills Have Stranglers*), the Uwe Boll of serial killer film directors.

There's a dearth of information available regarding the best of these three films, the 1976 French/German/Canadian co-production *Born For Hell* (a.k.a. *Naked Massacre*), which is unfortunate since it raises some questions. Principally, why was the setting for an otherwise historically accurate film about Speck transplanted from 1966 Chicago to 1976 Belfast at the height of Northern Ireland's sectarian violence?

Born For Hell opens with our killer (Mathieu Carrière) attending a church service that's rudely interrupted by a bombing that leaves several

parishioners dead. He then walks the streets of Belfast while a festive pub song plays in the background, punctuated by distant gunfire and explosions. As is the case with *Targets* and *I Spat on Your Grave*, *Born For Hell* has no background score per se — music, when it's heard at all, emanates exclusively from motivated sources.

French Canadian director Denis Héroux keeps the violence up close and personal, and, like Tobe Hooper at the top of his game, skillfully keeps us identifying with the victims at all times. Mathieu Carrière's cold, dead-eyed portrayal of Speck is remarkably restrained even during the film's most violent passages; he simply seems resigned to these horrific acts as part of his destiny, just as he seems resigned to getting caught afterward. Similar to *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, and to a lesser degree *Maniac*, the film's greatest strength lies in its unflinching objectivity and staunch refusal to leer.

Chicago Massacre and *Speck* are widely available (from Lionsgate and Shadow Entertainment, respectively), while *Born For Hell*, sadly, is not; I stumbled across it under its *Naked Massacre* moniker in one of MML Creek Entertainment's awesome 60-movie bargain basement box sets, but it's unavailable on its own. The upside? Well, with the box set you get 49 more movies, dumb-ass.

Now get the hell out of my basement so I may speculate upon my own captivities. **A**



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IN THIS ISSUE!

- DELPHINE #3** IDW 4
Richard Sala *FantaGraphics* Docomp
- THE DEMONS OF SHERWOOD** MEERKS 1-40
Bo Hampton and Robert Tinnell *ComicMix.com*
- GHOSTING #1-5**
Fred Van Lente and Charles Converse
Platinum Studios
- SEVEN NC**
David Saldivia and various *Zenoscope*
- FRIDAY THE 13TH TPB**
by Palmiotti, Gray and Archer
- THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE TPB**
by Abbott, Lanning and Craig
- A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET TPB**
by Chuck Diase and Kevin West
DC/Wildbow

I have to confess, Richard Sala's current miseries, *Delphine*, took me by surprise. Very pleasant surprise. I am a great fan of American expressionist cartoonist Sala (the ongoing *Evil Eye* series, *Thirteen O'clock* and *The Ghostly Ones*), whose works blend elements of horror, mystery and dark comedy in a comic book format with the relentless pacing of a Republic serial. But *Delphine* had somehow slipped under my radar, so when the first three (of four) issues landed on my desk, I wasn't predisposed to look for a particular storyline, aside from simply expecting a "Richard Sala." My point being that I wasn't trying to find avatars for the fairy tale of Snow White, which the series is compared to.

This is why, in many respects, my initial encounter with the mysterious, enchanting Delphine Penny – the story's titular but practically absent lead – was not dissimilar to that of the anonymous hero who sets out to save her. (Whether she wants him to is another question.) As our hero, to whom Sala simply refers to as "The Traveller," becomes lost in the peculiar town to which Delphine purportedly disappeared, the one thing that becomes clear is how little the young man actually knows about her. As readers derive giddy delight watching him falter and flumble and get all the more lost, we also witness his memories of Delphine – the only sections in which she appears – become more confused.

So, Snow White, the story is not, despite being rife with conscious nods to the fairy tale, which explains why publisher FantaGraphics describes the project as a "re-imagining of Snow White." But the story is as much Sala's as anyone else's, and is additionally indebted to many other influences; werewolves, Greek myths and Hitchcock's *Psycho* all lurk within.

"Calling it a 're-imagining' may be a bit of a stretch," Sala agrees. "You wouldn't be wrong to say *Delphine* has as much to do with Snow White as Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* has to do with its inspiration, or *The Company of Wolves* with Little Red Riding Hood. But it's in there. ... Snow White was my

jumping-off point, and several plot elements from various versions are woven in."

Careful readers will notice dwarves, a woodsman, a looking glass and a disguised patriarchal type who misleads the Traveller. The references are indeed in there, but often off-panel. Consider the cover to issue #1, where the Traveller walks an empty village street, upon whose wall is cast the shadow of a crane unmistakably proffering an apple.

Sala confirms that this character is indeed "the stepmother, hateful and jealous of her stepdaughter, takes drastic measures to get rid of her. Age versus youth is a common theme in folk tales. The horrific images of adults – often parents – killing or even eating children haunt those stories and are still pretty shocking to read today," *Delphine*, for its part, features walking corpses, ritual sacrifices and murder-minded mayhem. Grim(m) stuff.

Appropriate to the story, Sala's famous mock-woodcut style and distinctive font are, as expected, at play in *Delphine*. But where his previous works have been almost exclusively black and white, this one is in duo-tone (black line, septa wash), and the impact is dramatic. Sala's work is always visually rich, now it's practically textured.

As issue #3 concludes, the Traveller still has not found Delphine, though he has stumbled into the stepmother (pictured). Will the boy get the girl?

"It's just as accurate to describe this story as my take on romance – which I haven't done before, in any of my books. I half-jokingly told a friend it's 'boy meets girl, loses girl, suffers the torments of hell trying to figure it all out, things get worse, the end.' Which



Boy Meets Girl, Boy Loses Girl, Boy Meets Wicked Stepmother: Richard Sala's *Delphine* examines fairy tales through a septa-coloured looking glass

gives you an idea of how I approach a romance story."

It's curious, as Sala's stories tend to end happily, the odd dead body notwithstanding – in this particular case, the poor woodsman's. Sala warns that readers may be in for something more "downbeat."

He elaborates: "I might also take exception to the idea that my stories have 'happy' endings. Maybe one could see them that way. Something I hit upon during several years of psychotherapy, though, the closest feeling I've ever had to actual 'happiness' in my adult life is 'relief.' And a lot of my stories end not with a sense of joy or celebration, but with a character just relieved to still be alive! For *Delphine*, who knows? I may not even allow that." ☹

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY GARY BUTLER

A weekly online freebie that launched on ComicMix.com last December and wraps late spring, *The Demons of Sherwood* is an intentional genre mash-up rooted in swash-buckling and horror, with a healthy dose of redemption comedy. Co-writers Bo Hampton and Robert Tinsell are clearly having a ton of fun dragging into action a drunken and past-his-prime Robin Hood who must save Maid Marian from becoming not only a demonic sacrifice but also – arguably worse – a nun. On art duties, Hampton is, as ever, right on target, particularly with choreography: in



Week 6, Robin's rope-swinging "rescue" of the victims of a witch-burning conveys a staggering amount of visceral action with less than a dozen panels. But the true highlight for fans of this magazine: Week 14's attack of the living dead, which features, hands-down

(heads- and dentures-, too), the finest body horror-comedy sequence since *Evil Dead 2*. Yes, that good, and it's a comic book.

Teen-targeted horror with the requisite I-know-what-you-did twist (this time out, a supernaturally stalked sorority/fraternity) *Ghosting* delivers overall but suffers from having more groan than *Scream*. Alas, this mini was "haunted" by the fact that it's a decade-old screen property that never got lensed. Ace writer Fred Van Lente's hands were clearly tied to some degree, because it just doesn't read like a real Fred book, drab dialogue in particular. Oftentimes too-cartoony art is an additional drawback, particularly the flutter-than-boring corpse reveal in the obviously rushed finale; too bad, because

the ceiling of eyeballs in issue #1 was killer, and most of the covers (#3, pictured) were strong. As for the plot, involving a college hazing gone lethal, it's damn solid, even if the ending is, again, rushed. Probably would have made a good enough movie... The curious should pick up the floppies before *Ghosting* becomes an urban legend, because a TPB collection has not been announced.



Possibly the most ambitious licensed concept to cross my desk in quite a while is the *Seven* miniseries. Not surprisingly, it was originally released as seven separate one-shots covering the back stories of the sin-targeted victims in David Fincher's 1995 film masterpiece. Formatted to resemble the killer's infamous notebooks, they've now been collected in a beautiful HC with an all-new concept cover, this one considering the John Doe's carefully crafted anonymity. The stories themselves are far from flawless – "Gluttony" and "Sloth" are downright cliché (too bad for the latter, as it features the best art in the book) – but they come together when they need to, which is to say,

when the process turns inward on the killer while ensnaring Detective Mills. In the end, this is a book notable for art over narrative, and supervising designer/artist David Seidman clearly deserves the credit. It's also worth the price of admission for the original series covers alone, any of which could be posters ("Gluttony" and "Pride" pictured).



Fear of Franchises

Some people pull out their hair watching horror film series, either from fright or frustration, but more the latter than the former when it comes to '80s franchises such as *Friday the 13th*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Surprisingly, this isn't the case for three comic-book extensions of these licensed properties, all collected in TPBs.

Jason, Leatherface and Freddy have done the rounds in this medium many times. Gore content has never been an issue, the problem has always been quality (gratuitous blood) over quality (checked plotting and action). I salute DC/Wildstorm for telling some of the most original franchise-bound tales these properties have experienced in a long time.



None of them are perfect, of course, but with the exception of the original *Texas* film, the points of inspiration were uniformly flawed and inconsistent as well.

Why fans should read these comics: Freddy gets

hella-creatively outwitted by both a girl in a coma (is she sleeping or isn't she?) and a culturally accurate Mexican sleep demon. Jason's power is made manifest when his bike is revealed to be far from "Crystal" clear, as pig-guns made it a dumping ground for slaughtered natives. And the one-armed Leatherface (per the conclusion of the 2005 sequel) must contend with a Rambo-type FBI agent who is racking up just as many chainsaw executions, of Leatherface's own family.

Mileage varies for the art, *Friday* standing as the best with a slew of marvelously arranged Jason kills, and *Texas* the most functional. But perhaps the most important distinction is that these stories simply feel right, in terms of representing the voice of each respective franchise. A recent *Freddy vs Jason vs Ash* miniseries was a misstep, but even it sported a plot driver considerable of the source material. For once, a comics licensee cares more than Hollywood. **B**

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NEKROMANTIK
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Nekromantik, made in 1987, was one of the last true underground films – a graphic sex 'n' death, pre-internet flick that made its way around the world via shoddy bootleg videos and folks such as film writer and exhibitionist Jack Stevenson, who toured a print in the 1980s. Watching *Nekromantik* in a small, smoky screening room was just the way to experience this out-there grainfest because, really, it was something you had to find, had to discover.

In *Nekromantik*, six German film writers reflect on discovering Jörg Buttgeriet's movie as it unspooled before their eyes for the first time. By localizing the contributors, the book embarks on a region-specific view of the film, linking it to Germany's troubled past and the fact that some of the most non-erotic porn available still comes from there.

In the sidesplitting essay "Reality Check – The Gravedigger's Perspective," Johannes Schoenherr tosses aside the film's plot and characters with his moribund account of how bodies are planted and exhumed; Dietrich Kulbrodt's contribution "Loving Corpses" revels in the film's – and Germany's – excesses; while Marcus Stiglegger, Lammie Blake and Claus Loser take a more scholarly approach to



the material. Stiglegger examines how the time Buttgeriet spent living in the then still-divided Berlin influenced his *Nekromantik* films, while Loser and Blake both postulate on where the film fits within Germany's cinematic history and the horror genre in general, including why it's been so frequently banned.

Published in both German and English in one pocket book-size volume, *Nekromantik* also includes an amazing collection of unseen stills. It's rare enough to see an erect penis in a film history book, but to see one alongside a gramaing blood-costed face erupting in ecstasy, pain and release – that's why they call them money shots.

Nicely presented, well-illustrated, thick with informative film history and boasting an introduction by Buttgeriet himself, *Nekromantik* is a priceless addition to any serious horror film fan's library, and an absolute treat for the closeted corpse lover in all of us.

Shade Rape

the films of kiyoshi kurosawa: Master of Fear

Jerry White
Stone Bridge Press

Consistency. It's not a quality Japanese filmmaker Kiyoshi Kurosawa is known for. This becomes very apparent in Jerry



White's *The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa: Master of Fear*, as he surveys the director's wildly uneven 25-plus title filmography.

Kurosawa is known in North America for his arty horror films, notably *Cure* and the masterpiece *Pulse* (a.k.a. *Kairo*), yet his filmography is long and varied, and includes Yakuza films, dramas, comedies, pink films and some less easily classifiable fare (e.g. *Eyes of the Spider* doesn't deliver monster mania by any means).

Since all these are explored with equal weight, "Master of Fear" is something of a dishonest title, although White – a contributor to *Asian Cult Cinema* – does offer insight into Kurosawa's horror by juxtaposing his fright flicks and non-fright flicks. For example, *Pulse* turns out to be a harrowing amplification of the filmmaker's ongoing themes of technology, isolation and apocalypse. On the other hand, for horror fans, it's a slog to get through six consecutive chapters on Kurosawa's *Suit Yourself* or *Shoot Yourself!* gangster buddy series.

Consistency proves to not only be a challenge for Kurosawa, but to White, as well. Chunks of *Master of Fear* feel perfunctory, and overall it lacks the flow and style of similar books, such as Tom Mes' *Iron Man: The Cinema of Shinya Tsukamoto*. Much of the awkwardness stems from White's habit of switching styles, sometimes he's offering a more technical decon-

The Grim Reader

HISTORY IS DEAD

Kim Paffenroth
Penned Press

History may be dead, but this deceptively savage anthology explores a fictional zombie sub-culture that's been thriving since long before mankind took the reins. Though many of the stories stem from European roots – don't they all? – *History Is Dead* dishes out the brains with a modern tongue that's more brooding than bloody. Class deceased!

Richard Hipson



BUTTON, BUTTON: UNCANNY STORIES

Richard Matheson
TOR

In the wake of the big-budget disappointment *I Am Legend*, many of Richard Matheson's tales are being reissued, including his short stories. Collected here are a dozen of his best, beginning with "Button, Button," the memorable tale that inspired a *Twilight Zone* episode as well as the upcoming adaptation by Richard Kelly, *The Box*. It also features a new intro by the grand master of horror and suspense himself. Essential.

Jovanke Vuckovic



THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY: THE DEADLY CATCH

Damien Graves
Scholastic

In *The Deadly Catch* – the latest of tales in the *Midnight Library* series for preteens – Damien Graves scores up a huge tentacle sea creature, a stubborn infestation of house mice and some special lip gloss that grants wishes but only at the pain and expense of others. Unfortunately, Graves has a penchant for morality tales and think-the-worst-open-ended conclusions, making the stories more predictable than pebbling, even for the little ones.

Monica S. Kuebler



ULRIK

Steve Wedel
Soyuz Press

When Sheri's son is kidnapped to ogle her mentor's personal agenda, the war begins to fly in this adrenaline-fueled reinvention of the lycanthropic world. Sheri must now give in to her inner bitch and accept her prophetic role as Mother of the Pack or they're all doomed. Written in a style that's simple, raw, fierce and merciless, *Ulrik* will seduce readers into leaving the path and running with the wolves.

Richard Hipson



The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa: An inconsistent look at the director's inconsistent filmography, including Loft

straction, sometimes a film review and occasionally a jarring personal anecdote. Even the too-short Q&A with Kurosawa at the end of the book seems scattered.

In all fairness, Stone Bridge Press should've fixed this in the editing process, not to mention, made more of an effort to secure the appropriate stills to help illustrate White's points. Instead of including the corresponding screenshots when he's describing a specific scene composition, for example, a bunch of (presumably) press stills are crammed together at the beginning of the book.

Flaws aside, if you're into Kurosawa's strange, genre convention-challenging cinema, this first English-language book on the filmmaker is a treasure trove of painstakingly compiled info (including a chapter on his obscure Toho Hooper-influenced slasher *The Guard From Underground*!).

Inconsistency forgiven

Dave Alexander

film Alchemy: The independent cinema of Ted V. Mikels

Christopher Wayne Curry
McFarland

Of all the mad genaises of genre cinema who have been rediscovered in the DVD age, it's strange that Ted V. Mikels has yet to receive his due. Christopher Wayne Curry's *Film Alchemy: The Independent Cinema of Ted V. Mikels* is an ambitious film-by-film breakdown of the director's 50-year career, but it falls far short of providing either a fascinating personal biogra-

phy or the even-handed academic treatment that his subject demands.

Rather, *Film Alchemy* is an unsatisfying, weekly written effort that reads more like a fan letter to Mikels than an attempt to provide readers with honest, or even informative, appraisals of his films. Curry, who previously penned *A Taste of Blood: The Films of Herschell Gordon Lewis*, does muster admirable enthusiasm for undeniably flawed and cheap outings such as *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils* and *Astro Zombies*, but even ardent Mikels fans will find his praise of "fantastic performances" and "arresting, tactile" cinematography far-fetched.

During his awkwardly phrased and often rambling analysis, Curry does make a few attempts to paint Mikels' filmography as a cinema of female empowerment, but it never amounts to a credible argument. In fact, the book is notable more for its omissions than anything else. A discussion of Mikels' indie-cutie *Dr. Sex* conspicuously skips over the then-current Kinsey Reports, and a look at 1966's *The Black Klansman* makes no mention of the classic 1961 book *Black Like Me* (or its 1964 film adaptation) whose premise Mikels played off of.

Worse, some of Ted's more dubious anecdotes – *The Doll Squad* theme was "almost" nominated for an Academy Award, Mikels supposedly refused the chance to work on *Easy Rider* after he caught Dennis Hopper taking up in his office – are reported as unquestioned fact.

The real meat of this book is the unabridged Q&A about Ted's bomb-laden history as a magesian, bodybuilder, fence-

FIRST PUBLISHED 50 YEARS BEFORE STOKER'S *DRACULA*, PENNY DREADFUL
STAR *VARNEY THE VAMPIRE* FINALLY RETURNS TO TERRIFY THE MASSES.

UNDEAD AGAIN

—BY JAMES GRAINGER—

Fog descends on a dark cobblestone lane, a lonely church bell chimes in the night, and from the shadows emerges a towering aristocrat in black cape and top hat, smelling of freshly dug graves. His eyes blaze and his wolf-like fangs gleam in the gaslight. Swooping down on his mesmerized victim, the vampire feeds, leaving behind a lifeless body that will reanimate with the next rising of the moon.

Conventional wisdom holds that these images were burned onto the popular imagination by Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, but if Curt Herr, an editor, author and professor of gothic literature, has his way, vampire aficionados will finally be able to drink deeply from the real literary font of all things vampiric: *Varney the Vampire, or The Feast of Blood*, by James Malcolm Rymer.

Published a full 50 years earlier than Stoker's work, *Varney the Vampire* is acknowledged as the first full-length vampire novel in the English language (John Polidori's "The Vampyre," published in 1819, is a long short story) and the template for almost every vampire novel and movie that's followed. So why have so few people read the work, or even heard of it?

Herr, who has edited a new critical edition of the 700-plus-page novel, complete with essays, footnotes and a readers' guide to the story's multiple plot lines, has a few theories to explain the neglect, first among them the very format in which *Varney* originally published appeared.

"*Varney the Vampire* was published as a Penny Dreadful," he explains, "and Penny Dreadfuls were not — and still aren't — respect-

ed." Penny Dreadfuls were serialized novels and stories, often featuring a mesmerizing blend of incest, rape, murder, cannibalism and witchcraft, printed on cheap paper and sold on street corners in weekly installments for a penny a sheet to the Victorian working classes, who couldn't afford to buy bound novels or pay library fees.

"The upper class Victorians considered the Penny Dreadfuls street literature and trash, and capable of turning children into murderous thieves," adds Herr. "Much like they do now with contemporary rock and rap lyrics, the protected classes blamed Penny Dreadfuls for terrible crimes."

One of the most successful of these serials was Rymer's *Varney the Vampire*, which went from 1847 to 1849 and ran for over 250 chapters, making its titular anti-hero a Victorian household name on the wrong side of London town. After a successful second printing a couple of years later, the novel faded into near obscurity. Its reputation as a lurid mishmash of gothic clichés, subplots that go nowhere and plot holes, all written in a style that one critic called "unreadable, rambling, overblown and tedious," prevented it from receiving the academic attention

bestowed on other works of Victorian popular fiction.

Herr acknowledges that the novel's prose can be sloppy and overwrought at times, but with



good reason. "The underpaid writers had no time for revisions. Their tales went from their pen to press in minutes, so naturally, there are errors in plot details, chronology — even names shift."

The authors, like today's TV soap-opera writers, also had to keep the story going for as long as the public demanded new chapters, meaning that *Varney the Vampire* piles up the climaxes and false endings before its eventual ending, Herr insists, though, that readers who stay until the end will be amply rewarded.

"*Varney* is a more thoroughly developed character than *Dracula*," he asserts. "He is psychologically complex and tormented with guilt. He regrets his vampiric condition, yet he realizes that he must continue to destroy lives in order to survive."

Herr's book is the first full edition of the novel not photocopied from the original serialized pages, which were often smudgy and hard to read, and he has included plenty of footnotes to shepherd new readers through the sensationalist conventions of Victorian pop culture. With this new edition of *Varney the Vampire*, the haunter of London's back lanes who fed on the blood and flesh of city's upper classes may yet get his due. The story, with its brooding atmosphere, pervasive sense of dread and wickedly high body count would make a great film.

As Herr points out, *Varney's* long-dead author just scored a hit with an adaptation of another of his Penny Dreadful potboilers, *The String of Pearls*, which introduced Victorian readers to a barber with a razor fetish who plied his trade under the name of Sweeney Todd.

For more information visit cuthbert.com.



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AFTER DARK FILMS



Was it only a week ago that I was here at the Hollywood Forever cemetery in the heart of Los Angeles, California, for the funeral of Ms. Milla Nurmi, a.k.a. *Vampire*? Now I'm back on a sunny Saturday with my girlfriend Lucinda and daughter Marion in tow for a tour of this 60-acre field of dreams—as your intrepid reporter for *Rue Morgue*. Why bring along a nine-year-old on a two-hour stroll through the dead and buried, you might ask? It's good exercise, there are trees to climb, plenty of ducks and geese to chase and, for the Moseleys, this definitely qualifies as family time.

Our tour, led by a delightful young necrologist named Karle Bible, commences at noon at the gift/flower shop ("Significant Sites" maps, \$5; black and white Tyrone Power postcard, \$1.50) near the wrought-iron cemetery gates. I gather up Lucinda and Marion—they're window shopping for caskets, which somehow makes me nervous. Yes, we've got water, sunscreen (and wooden stakes and a mallet—just in case).

Born on Halloween night not so many years ago, Ms. Bible grew up in the South touring Civil War battle sites and developing a love for the world of movies, especially the silents. Today she leads our tour, sporting a vintage black dress and, according to Marion, has one blue eye and one brown eye.

As she guides our little packet of paying customers past the Garden of Memory and the Pathway of Remembrance, Bible informs us that Hol-

lywood Forever started out as the 100-acre Hollywood Memorial Park back in 1899. The cemetery rose to prominence (can a cemetery do that?) during the 1920s and '30s with the interment of such cinema luminaries as Rudolph Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Cecil B. DeMille. Alas in 1939 a man named Jules Roth bought the place, and Memorial Park began a slow death spiral. As my co-star Jim "The Cook" Sledow says in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, "Then after the glory—here comes the shame..."

During his ownership, Roth sold off 40 acres, bought himself a yacht for "burials at sea" (it was actually used as a party boat) and hung a large, garish painting of Hell in the lobby of the main building! His once-robust workforce dwindled, the grass grew wild and the park eventually became a haven for criminal gangs and the homeless. Roth actually started making more money from disinterments than burials as appalled families began relocating their loved ones to better turf like Inglewood Park and the Forest Lawns (there are a couple of them).

Things got so bad, the State of California prohibited Memorial Park from selling plots. Finally, on the verge of closure due to bankruptcy (how do you close a cemetery?), Memorial Park was sold in 1939 for a pittance to Forever Enterprises, a family-owned business with a string of cemeteries throughout the USA. New owner Tyler Cassidy poured millions into refurbishing Memorial Park—including renaming it Hollywood Forever Cemetery—and it appears that both the living and the dead are happy with the results. So is the State of California, for that matter; Hollywood Forever can sell plots again, so stop right up!

As we find out during our tour, this isn't your typical "lawn park" cemetery, folks. Lawn parks are flat, grassy oases embedded with grave plates (yawn). Hollywood Forever has monuments, and

plenty of them: marble headstones, obelisks, crypts, and mausoleums—upon which horror films are projected several times during the summer for public viewing as part of Cinespia Cemetery Screenings programming. And guess what? Bugsy Siegel's here! So are Daria and Alfalfa from *The Little Rascals*, Tyrone Power and Maxwell Smart himself, Don Adams! There's even the marker in the shape of an Atlas rocket for graphic artist Carl Morgan Bigsby. The husband's epitaph reads: "Retired by God"; his wife's: "Too bad, we had fun."

"People like to abandon animals here," our guide says as she takes us over to the big cages that line the great grey Santa Monica Blvd. wall. There's a rabbit hutch with a bunch of fat, healthy bunnies whiskering around, a cage with two black swans and their two grey fuzzy cygnets and a wire enclosure with five peafowl—there used to be six that had the run of the park, but someone ran off the albino peacock, so now they're in lockdown "for their own good."

When we reach Milla Nurmi's plot, I'm surprised to find that someone has left two black-handled kitchen knives, one stuck in the floral arrangement standing over the grave, the other laid out on the patch of grass covering the buried ashes of Milla and her dog, Houdini. Gifts from Benihana? Doubtful. Two jack-o'-lanterns from the funeral are still side-by-side on the ground nearby, one with black leopards falling from its carved eyes. And not ten feet away, the marble headstone of Darren McGavin, "*The Nightstalker*," there to engage *Vampire* in fun-loving vampire games for all eternity (consider the stakes!).

Whoops, time for a horror interlude! I mean, this place is not exactly crawling with zombies ("They're coming to get you, Barbara. They're horny; they've been dead a long time!"). What to do for you scare fans? Why, call up Sgt. Hulse, a.k.a. Captain Spaulding himself, my *House of 1000*

Funeral Home

Corpses and Devil's Rejects co-star – after all, I've got unlimited weekend minutes.

Sid's in Chicago at a horror convention, he tells me he used to work over the cemetery wall at Paramount Studios. He was on the old Mission Impossible TV sound stage when a co-worker came up from the basement looking a little pale. When asked what the problem was, the man claimed that he'd heard bumping and banging through the basement walls. Sid was later told that the sound was coffins from Hollywood Memorial Park that had dropped into an underground river that flowed beneath the cemetery and Paramount!

Now where were we? Oh, yes....

Halfway through the tour, the sunny day turns cold and cloudy. Rain threatens. Our guide leads us past Tyrone Powers' and Harry Cohn's white marble slabs to the Cathedral Mausoleum. Inside, among the life-size Greek statues and stained-glass windows, we visit the marble niches of Peter Lorre, Peter Finch ("I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore!") and the late, great Rudolph Valentino. It is at Rud's wall plaque that Ms. Bible confesses she has picked up the mantle of the Lady in Black, and come Valentino's birthday every year, she dons a black veil and drives her sleeping knight a single red rose.

Movin' on, fresh air, raindrops and Johnny Ramone's rockin' statue overlooking an ornamental pond filled with koi and courting waterfowl.

From the Garden of Legends, we beeline to the modest slab of Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer, shot dead at 39 for disputing a \$50 reward he had proffered for the return of his dog. Yet another sad/bad Hollywood tale of a child star come to a bitter and early end ("Dog will hunt!").

Marion seems more interested in the penny on Alfalfa's gravesite than his tragic demise. Bible explains that people place pennies on the various stones for good fortune (e.g. "pennies from heaven"). Apparently, before a weekend in Las Vegas, some high rollers go as far as to put silver coins and even paper money on Bugs Siegel's grave to improve their gambling luck!

We can't visit Mr. Siegel, though, because it's Saturday and the Beth Olam Mausoleum is closed for the Sabbath. So our final stop is Mel Blanc, "Man of 1000 Voices," responsible for Bugs



Bunny, Tweety Pie and Daffy Duck. We pony up what we owe Ms. Bible (\$10 a head). Lucinda and Marion take off to find some lunch, and I take a final car cruise around the park with Daniel T. Johnson on cassette tape (hey, it's a '99 VW Golf!). Over the final notes of "Funeral Home," I swear I can hear Mel Blanc's Porky Pig stuttering, "A-beeka-beeka-beeka that's all, folks!"

The Hollywood Forever Cemetery is located at 6000 Santa Monica Boulevard at Gower in Los Angeles, California. For more info on the walking tour, visit cemeterytour.com. Cinepia's Cemetery Screenings begin in March; more info at cinepia.org/calendar.php.



Hollywood Forever: (clockwise from top) A view of the Hollywood sign from the cemetery gates, the headstone belonging to Darren "Volchek" McGavin, Marie Naxos's grave, Peter and wife Anne Marie Lorre's gravesite and (toppled) Bill Moseley at the front of the cemetery.

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THE GORE-MET

MENU

The Gore-met orders up some Chinese, heavy on the Cat.

The government of the People's Republic of China recently declared a ban on "all video and audio products containing elements of horror or the supernatural," citing a need to protect the "psychological health" of children. There are sinister implications here — how long will it be before an authoritarian regime with a track record of crushing dissidence beneath tank treads decides to start burning Hong Kong film archives?

Colour me alarmed if you will, but I fear the adult Category III films produced there between 1988 and 1997 are doomed. Cat III is more than a film rating, it's a genre of lurid exploitation flicks that truly deliver the titbits and tastelessness fans revel in. Following are two examples of films I see in imminent peril.

Find them! Hide them!

DAUGHTER OF DARKNESS (1993)

Starring Lily Chung, Hugo Ng and Anthony Wong
Written and directed by Ivan Lai
Universe Laser and Video

This film successfully mirrors the plot structure of Cat III crime classics *Dr. Lamb* (1992) and *The Untold Story* (1993) — a heinous mass murder is discovered, and after an ensuing police investigation, the killer confesses in excruciating flashback sequences — but in this film the killer is a woman. (Note: there is no whodunit aspect to this genre.)

Police Captain Lau (Anthony Wong) is interrupted during his daily routine of haranguing petty criminals by pretty, young Wong (Lily Chung), who reports that her family was massacred while she was away with a boyfriend. Lau, a Cantonese Columbo whose

homespun forensic techniques include groping a victim's breasts to test for rigor mortis and sniffing her crotch to determine if she had sex before being killed, literally stumbles into the gruesome crime scene. His investigation leads him to Wong's boyfriend Kin (Hugo Ng), a fellow cop who, when confronted, immediately claims responsibility for the slaughter. Wong steps forward as the killer to spare her lover, and, in flashback, reveals that she was mercilessly tormented by her mother and siblings and sexually abused by her lecherous father (Ka-Kui Ho), who was blackmailing her for sex with photos he had taken while raping her.

Daughter of Darkness typifies the broad black humour, explicit sex, grunting violence and ham-fisted melodrama found in most Cat III films. The first half is morbidly funny due to a wonderfully arch performance by Anthony Wong, which is intended to disarm the audience before the graphic violence of the second act and heavy-handed schmaltz of the third.

Yeah, I cried at the end.

TRILOGY OF LUST II (1996)

Starring Julie Lee, Chin Gwan and Hoi Gai-Yung
Directed by Jiro Ishimura and Julie Lee
Written by Julie Lee
Mei Ah Entertainment

While other Cat III films may exhibit more ostentatious depravity onscreen, they're leavened with underlying black humour. *Trilogy of Lust II*, however, is notable for being unrelentingly nihilistic, without a single intentional chuckle.

Linda Li (Julie Lee) is an icy office manager bent on bullying her workers — who call her "spinstor" behind her back. Two of them, lovers Lily (Chin Gwan) and Robert (Hoi Gai-Yung), concoct a ploy in which Robert is to seduce Linda and swindle money from her. They don't know that away from the office, Linda likes to dress in fetish



gear and pick up men for kinky sex, before torturing, killing and mutilating them, taking away body parts (an ear, a nose or a penis) as souvenirs, which she keeps in a secret cupboard full of sex toys. However, when Linda learns through a news report that one of her victims had AIDS, she comes completely unglued and commits suicide by gang rape!

The film boasts elaborate set pieces — a man suspended from a sex swing is impaled on a steel pipe, another has a dead octopus dropped on his genitals before Linda takes a staple gun to his naked flesh and a third is sliced up in a perverse parody of a cooking show — yet the gore is relatively minimal. What makes this film particularly sleazy in a sleazy genre is the base depiction of sex. The film is full of lengthy and emotionless scenes of masturbation and animalistic fucking that border on hardcore, with a couple of fake cum shots tossed off (hey) for good measure. This HK riff on *I Spit on Your Grave* is possibly the most incessantly crass Cat III film. Dig it!

At one time, these titles were widely distributed and common in Chinese video stores, but rampant piracy has destroyed that market. Hunt them down online and help preserve the perversion. ☹





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a film by rodrigo gudiño

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REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON LUFTON AND TREVOR TUMINSKI



DRIFTWOOD

William Ross

BSX Records

William Ross is mainstream enough to have conducted last year's Academy Awards (not to mention *Harry Potter* and *The Chamber of Secrets*) but his score for *Driftwood*—director Tim Sullivan's attempt to break away from goofy horror in favour of disturbing dark drama—is anything but your typically extravagant Hollywood piece. The album is based primarily around a recurring minimalist theme, haunting piano reminiscent of *The Fog*. From there the music branches out in various directions, but always maintains its tragic and morose sensibility, moving from beautiful orchestral pieces to near-industrial suspense numbers, capturing the essence of the film's tortured ghost, Jonathan. The only shortcomings on this soundtrack are four irritating alt-rock numbers by no-name artists that disrupt what is otherwise a gorgeously chilling score. **AVL** 2.5/2

Soundtrack

band orchestra to contemporize his score, the raw performances and idiosyncratic orchestrations (not to mention some audacious tribal vocals) hearken back to the late '60s, when genre composers would radically shift a cue's ambience from a sly, eerie stalking motif to a tidal wave of shrill notes. Most of the cues here are designed to shock or unsettle, but a few are quite melodic, including some lengthy romantic material that's effectively tender but never cloying. The mono source tapes are a bit rough in spots, but new label Elysée has assembled a loving tribute to a composer making his long-deserved international debut after 38 years. *'Bout time!* **MRH** 3.5/3.5



JUDGEHYDROGEN

Atheistic God

PSYMO ODOLUS RECORDINGS

Professing to be "the soundtrack for the coming human-made apocalypses," Judgehydrogen's debut *Atheistic God* is an intoxicating—if not a bit pretentious—listen that feels like the last few moments before passing out underwater. The monotone vocal delivery (think early Nick Cave on downers) doesn't always observe key, timing or melody, but floats well on the sea of synths the Judge seems to have nabbed from John Carpenter's keyboard collection. "Your Warning," "Contempt for Sacrifice" and the title track feel most comfortable with this treatment, the latter introducing a bestial wail not used anywhere else on the album, but the overall results are just so depressingly laboured, it makes Joy Division seem giddy in comparison. Forget the coming apocalypse and save

Experimental

this for some weekend when you and your lover plan to stay in for a romantic bloodletting. **TT** 2.5/2



THE UNDEAD

Still The Undead...

After All These Years

Post Mortem

After a brief "self-imposed hiatus" from the music world, legendary exiled Misfits' guitarist Bobby Steele is back with *Still The Undead...After All These Years*. The newish nineteen-cut collection of rare Undead 45s and unreleased songs from the last decade, music to the ears of anyone who thought all the good punk icons were either dead or running for congress. The recent stuff rocks: "Be My Ghoul" is utterly classic Undead, a fierce

Punk

two-minute blast of hot love over cold earth, while "Rock 'n' Roll Whore" is a bluesy kind of Beatles-meets-Alice Cooper carpet ride with surprisingly slick production. The live stuff is also decent but redundant. Sources say a full disc of new material is en route for 2008, but in the meantime, also check out The Undead's unreleased cover of The Misfits' "12 Hits from Hell" album, streaming for free at undeadpunk.com. **TD** 3.5/3.5



PIGGY D.

The Evacuation Plan

BLACK VICTORY RECORDS

Piggy D (a.k.a. Matt Montgomery) has made a career in horror rock, first as a member of long-defunct

Rock



MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND

Tito Arevalo

Elysée Productions

Tito Arevalo's score for this classic John Ashley/Eddie Romero schlocker is vintage B-movie monster music. While the Filipino composer uses electric guitar and a brassy big

Soundtrack



THE FORGOTTEN DIMENSION

A Cool Sound Dutta Hell

Suave or Ven

Still wet with wiles nearly two decades in, Calgary's Jackson Phibes (a.k.a. Tom Bagley, whose fun monster art adorns the album cover and liner notes) finally returns with a full-length follow-up to 1997's stellar *Widow's Walk*. Highlights here include "The Night has a Thousand Tongues," a hardcore head-fuck which kicks in and out of gear like a '63 Caddy hears sputtering then lurching as it sucks on its final drops of fuel and "Gadriemmer," which carves sharp keys into an electric gothabilly-surf sound. "Hatchet Fight in Mannequin Factory"—a break-neck instrumental number with enormous-pounding drums—doesn't even have to be good with a title like that, but it actually is! Released by Calgary's *Saved by Vinyl* on bloody red acetate with a cold blue cartoonish cover design, this one comes with a handy download code to access the album's digital MP3s for free. **TD** 3.5/3.5

Punk



Metal Blade Records DROPS TWO DVDS FULL OF BLOOD 'N' BRUTALITY IN HONOR OF ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY.

THE Cutting Edge

The 25th Year in Videos

Directed by various

Remember when you used to set up your VCR to tape the best videos from your favourite metal TV program? Metal Blade does. Hence *The 25th Year in Videos*, a collection of production videos shot for the label's artists throughout 2007, featuring an onslaught of gorecore, melocore and every other metallic "core" imaginable. As interesting as it can be ridiculous, footage ranges from the eerie, faceless entities tormenting Six Feet Under during "Ghosts of the Undead" and a creepy, blood-soaked little girl preening fiendishly in her mirror on King Diamond's "Give Me Your Soul," to simplistic live footage via Goatwhore's "Forever Consumed Oblivion." On the hilarious end of the spectrum, shots of SFU lip-synching to their own death metal in a sunny field interspersed with a redneck building a pigeon is outright comical. Flashed out with material from the likes of Unearth, The Red Chord, As I Lay Dying and more, the collection is a substantial overview of the current state of metal. **★★★**



25th Anniversary Concert

Directed by Dave Gutt

Shot during an April 2007 birthday concert celebrating The Blade in Worcester, MA, this disc features more than two hours of live performances from some of metal's most commanding acts. Showcasing two songs each, some of the artist performances are finely executed but somewhat boring, including Corpse, whose members can barely muster a few obligatory head-spins during renditions of "Unleashing the Bloodthirsty" and "Murder Workshop." Others show off amusing yet half-assed antics; practicing about dressed as a roving vampire carrying a hatchet, Lizzy Borden (front man of Lizzy Borden, of course) attacks a buxom blonde and her "blood" spews (read: dribbles) about the stage. Still, with 29 tracks from fifteen bands, multiple camera angles, pristine sound and bonus inter-views/backstage footage, *25th Anniversary Concert* is like an All Access pass to the inner workings of musical brutality. **★★★**



Keith Carman

cross-dressing horror punk act She Demons, then as a guitarist for goth glam icon Wednesday 13's solo band, and currently handling bass duties for Rob Zombie. On *The Evacuation Plan*, Piggy's first-ever solo album, he's left the cartoonish aspects of his other acts in the coffin, choosing instead to offer a dark meditation on his first-hand experience with Hurricane Katrina. Despite its no-frills, '90s rock sound, this is a solid album — it captures melodic punk and modern rock in anthemic songs that are both hard hitting and infectious. But fans looking for something akin to the other bands Piggy's played in will be disappointed. Interestingly, Calico Cooper (Alice's daughter) receives full band member credit as a backup vocalist, though her contributions are nearly undetectable. **AVL ★★★**



NECRODEATH

Draculae
Scarlet/SPV

Twenty-five years into their career, black metal stalwarts of Necrodeath are still going strong. This latest nine-song effort, a concept album based on Vlad "The Impaler" Tepes, segments the historical figure's life into its more memorable moments, such as birth ("V.T. 1431"), the first taste for blood ("Smell Of Blood"), his step into royalty ("Impaler Prince") and eventual demise ("V.T. 1476"). Ferocious and steely, *Draculae* is

an onslaught of technical brilliance, crisp recording and audio dynamics — the extreme opposite of traditional black metal, which is too often mired in shifty production and overall flatness. Taking a cue from Satyricon, the group has incorporated more rock 'n' roll riffing into the songs, which offsets the low-end chugging and traditional blast beats, making *Draculae* their strongest effort to date. Their cover of Venom's "Countess Bathory" only seals the deal. **KC ★★★★★**



SEVERE TORTURE Sworn Vengeance

Enslaved

While formidably gruff and offensive, this seventh album from Netherlands-based death metal brigade Severe Torture seems typical at first. The disc, as with its predecessors, pulls its shocking lyrical foundation from obvious influences, such as Cannibal Corpse, and the evil element reeks of seminal satanic purveyors Deicide. Yet when one delves deeper into the primal, guttural delivery of tracks such as "Buried Hatchet," "Countless Villains," "Dogmatic Nausea" and the title track, *Sworn Vengeance* proves itself to be an enduring piece of detuned glory. Choppy and abrasive while still retaining inspired viciousness, the effort is incredibly sadistic and uncompromising. **KC ★★★★★**

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JOHNNY HOLLOW RETURNS WITH **DIRTY HANDS**, AN ALBUM OF TECHNO-GOTH POP SONGS FOR DISCERNING FREAKS.

THE ELECTROPOP ALCHEMY OF

Johnny Hollow

BY TREVOR TUMINSKI

Looking at the world through the artisan lens of Johnny Hollow, one gets the sense of a time and place far darker and romantically tragic than present reality. The band's gothic imagery and shadowy lost loves run like a thick, pulsing artery throughout every aspect of the lush melodrama the power trio of Vincent Marcone (electric acoustics/vocals), Janine White (vocals/keys/electric acoustics) and Kitty Thompson (cello/vocals) conjures up.

After releasing their 2003 self-titled first album independently, the trio signed to progressive Canadian imprint The Orange Record Label. For their newly released second album, *Dirty Hands*, the three-headed hydra from Guelph, Ontario attracted a dream list of collaborators, including Grammy-winning producer David Bottrill (TODD, King Crimson) to mix, producer Dave "Rave" Ogilvie (Skinny Puppy, Jakalope) and the Tea Party's Jeff Burrows to sit in on drums.

So, with all these legendary black hearts coming out of their secret lairs, just what does Johnny Hollow 2.0 sound like?

"If Tricky, Depeche Mode and Nine Inch Nails copulated directly into the uterus of Portishead you might get something similar to Johnny Hollow," says Marcone, the music video director (Jakalope, Mushroomhead) and accomplished designer/illustrator responsible for the band's twisted fairy tale aesthetic. "The girls likely have another take."

White's poisoned kiss vocals and Thompson's eerie cello and piano provide the haunted

woods fairy tale soundtrack for the world of the Johnny Hollow character, which Marcone brings to life graphically through the group's album art and website (johnnyhollow.com). On *Dirty Hands*, Hollow is depicted as a Victorian child-man in a top hat with a disturbing bug-eyed visage similar to a Mark Ryden character.

"Johnny is the best and worst of the three of us combined," says Marcone. "I tend to think of him as our very own personal doppelgänger, whom we can speak through without worrying about any filtered thoughts. He's kind of a trickster, he's capable of great kindness... but might also shove you off a cliff when you're not looking."

Musically, the direction of *Dirty Hands* pushes away ever so slightly from the evil laboratory that was their 2003 self-titled debut. The songs are more streamlined this time around—still punctuated by doom-summoning guitars and electronic ugliness—but more sweetly downtrodden, lending the music a certain palatability that may have eluded the trio before.

"Before writing the new album we asked ourselves a few questions," explains Marcone. "Do we have it in us to write a 'pop' song?

Would it still feel like we twisted it into something that we'd be comfortable with? We were happy to discover that the answer was 'yes.'"

He adds, "So we are now the proud, freakish parents of thirteen twitching and purpling new 'pop' songs. Though I dare you to present our brand of 'pop' to any fundamentalist Christian dance party."

The group's disturbing atmospherics did, however, lend themselves perfectly to a short film written by Rue Morgue president Rodrigo Guadín, whose latest directorial effort is a sort-of music video set in the world of Johnny Hollow, called *The Facts in the Case of Mr. Hollow*. Taking place in a stark, crow-populated forest, it presents an antiquated tableau that's slowly revealed to not be at all what it seems.

"We are just finishing it up now," says Marcone, who doesn't want to give away too much of the project, which will be released to the festival circuit this spring. "The first track of our album, 'Alchemy,' worked perfectly for a written treatment that Rodrigo had dreamed up. It's extremely strange, where the fine details in the movie end up telling the story. I can tell you that the imagery and theme falls right into place with Johnny's antiquated world." ☞



PLAY DEAD

▲ GRAPHICS 🎮 PLAYABILITY 🕷️ SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

Games reviewed by Andrew Lee



THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES

DS, PC, PS2, PS3, Wii, Xbox 360

Stern

Coinciding with the release of the movie based on a series of children's novels by Holly Black, *The Spiderwick Chronicles* is a fairly good introductory game for younger players who want to play a "scary" game without having to worry about the kind of nightmares that they usually evoke. If I'm looking in your direction, *Silent Hill*!

As one of the three Grace siblings, each of whom has his/her own unique weapons and abilities, you move through a world of fantastic, often frightening, creatures in the woodlands around their new house. There's also a

fourth character, a brownie, who is fun to play, as his diminutive size allows you to battle cockroaches and sneak through locations that are inaccessible to the other characters.

As you spend most of your time trying to catch sprites that will grant you power-ups to boost your health, speed and strength, game play tends to be painfully repetitive. On top of this, the voice work is subpar and the lack-lustre graphics appear rushed and unfinished.

Battling trolls, ogres and goblins with slingshots and tomato-juice guns involves a hell of a lot of button mashing, yet there is something oddly satisfying about smashing the crap out of a goblin with a baseball bat and then collecting his teeth to unlock a new attack move.

That said, although the game can be completed quickly — on average, about five hours — it becomes boring for any experienced gamers looking for more blood and guts and less fairy dust.



PENUMBRA: BLACK PLAGUE

PC

Electronic Arts

The conclusion to last year's howl-loosening fright fest *Penumbra: Overture* (RMA68), *Black Plague* picks up where the last one left off. Players once again take on the role of Philip, who's gotten trapped in a mysterious underground shelter filled with unimaginable horrors while searching for clues to his father's disappearance.

This time around, the developers focus less on monsters and more on the psychological terror of

being trapped in a dark, claustrophobic space where ambient sound effects lead you to believe something's waiting behind every corner.

The game employs a series of logic puzzles and play has been ramped-up with an advanced in-game physics system that has players mimic real-world actions. This means you use the mouse to push objects, twist knobs, turn handles and pull open drawers, just like you would in real life.

The only complaint is that at six hours to play through, it's over far too fast.



THE EXPERIMENT

PC

OrangeCrate Software

Just when it feels like you've played the same old survival horror game over and over again, it's extremely gratifying to come across a truly unique title like *The Experiment* (a.k.a. *Experience 112*).

Without any knowledge of who you are or how you got there, you find yourself trapped in the control room of a dilapidated tanker grounded on a remote Pacific island, trying to help a young woman who's the survivor of a failed medical research experiment. Though you can only see her through

the control room monitors, you must use a vast array of cameras, control switches and microphones to guide her to safety while avoiding the corpses of her former crew mates and a host of vicious plants and animals that have infested the ship.

Stunning graphics and an appropriately eerie soundtrack heighten the fright factor. Now, if only you could convince her to turn that shower room camera back on.

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Classic Cut Presents

THE KINGDOM



Lars von Trier
Denmark - 1994

A four-and-a-half-hour Danish horror soap opera doesn't seem like must-see TV for horror fans, but then again *The Kingdom* is a far cry from *Dark Shadows*. Originally shown as a miniseries on Danish television in 1994, it's a remarkable work of horror and one of the finest supernatural series to emerge after *Twin Peaks*. It also provided genre fans with the creepiest haunted building since the Overlook Hotel.

Lars von Trier was an acclaimed director before making *The Kingdom* (*Riget* in Danish), but he was also a cold, analytical stylist far more concerned with style than storytelling or performances. After signing a TV deal, he and long-time co-writer Niels Vørsel scripted a ghost story set in a hospital. A lifelong hypochondriac, von Trier found the medical establishment more terrifying a prospect than the supernatural and dispatched Vørsel to do all of the hospital research.

The result is a story set at Copenhagen's real-life Rigshospitalet (founded in 1757). A new head neurosurgeon joins the staff, immediately alienating his co-workers; a young med student steals a corpse's head for a prank, only to be caught by another doctor and forced into an extended game of blackmail; and a perpetual hypochondriac struggles to keep herself in the hospital so that she can solve the terrible mystery surrounding the ghost of a young girl haunting the halls (a storyline that incorporates antiquated Mütter Museum-like medical specimens). All these plot threads (and more) are woven into the first episode, with more bizarre, often ghastly subplots to come - including a phantom ambulance, a diseased body part transplant and a very unnatural pregnancy.

Once shooting began, it became clear that von Trier would not have the resources necessary to construct another one of his formally driven works, so he decided to experiment with a different type of visual storytelling. Influenced by Barry Levinson's *Homicide*, von Trier elected to forgo any sense of visual control for a messy and experimental aesthetic. Shot with handheld cameras and constantly changing blocking, *The Kingdom* is filled with deliberate jump cuts and continuity errors. The look of show has more in common with a straight documentary than the heavily storyboarded visual style common to the horror genre. As a result, the twisted stories, bizarre characters and frightening occurrences feel oddly realistic.

Much as David Lynch did in *Twin Peaks*, von Trier deftly undercuts the potentially cliché horror and soap opera elements with self-deprecating humor. The

oddball influence of Lynch's seminal series is felt in almost every scene of *The Kingdom*, as is that of *The Shining*. The haunted hospital is an undeniably creepy location, but it's impossible to watch the characters wandering down its empty and foreboding halls without thinking of the Overlook.

For a TV show originally broadcast in a small European country, *The Kingdom* has made quite an impact. The series predated the late '90s explosion of ghost stories (most of which involved children) that dominated horror cinema following the success of *The Sixth Sense* and the J-horror craze. (Not surprisingly, *The Kingdom* has a huge following in Japan.) The production also completely reinvented von Trier, who continued to experiment with the style he invented for *The Kingdom*, eventually applying the aesthetic to his infamous Dogma 95 filmmaking manifesto.

The director returned to the show with *Kingdom 2* in 1997, but seemed bored with the concept, creating a follow-up that was more comedic than horrific. He planned to rectify this with a darker concluding series, but with several of the lead actors now deceased it seems as though this will never happen.

The show was remade for North American television in 2004 as *Kingdom Hospital* (presented by Stephen King), a Craig R. Baxley-directed failure that had better production values but seemed to lose sight of what made the original series so special.

Regardless, the recently released series (by Koch-Lorber) continues to attract new fans to the horror hybrid that mashed together the hospital drama and ghost story, helped usher in Japan's obsession with supernatural children and spawned an entire film movement.

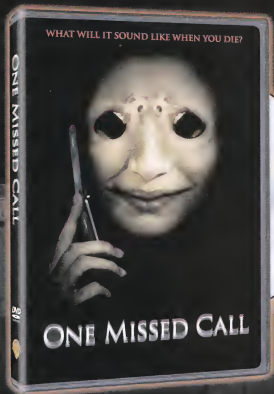
Philip Brown



Kingdom Revisited as *Singled Parents* in *The Kingdom*

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